

THE LEAP OF METAPHOR

IN the *Theaetetus*—after some seventy pages of showing that while true knowledge exists, defining it remains a logical impossibility—the unperturbed Socrates, having obtained from young Theaetetus agreement on this conclusion, states his own position or role:

Then supposing you should ever henceforth try to conceive afresh, Theaetetus, if you succeed, your embryo thoughts will be the better as a consequence of today's scrutiny, and if you remain barren, you will be gentler and more agreeable to your companions, having the good sense not to fancy you know what you do not know. For that, and no more, is all my art can effect; nor have I any of that knowledge possessed by all the great and admirable men of our own day or of the past. But this midwife's art is a gift from heaven; my mother had it for women, and I for young men of a generous spirit and for all in whom beauty dwells.

Now I must go to the portico of the King-Archon to meet the indictment which Meletus has drawn up against me. But tomorrow morning, Theodorus, let us meet here again.

The finding of this dialogue—that every attempt to arrive at a firm definition of knowledge had proved a failure—was not then and is not now a popular conclusion. Public men above all do not want uncertainty even hinted at, since it shakes the foundation of all that they say and do. Indeed, Socrates, as he casually remarks, is to be tried for his life by the public men of Athens for persisting in such subversive offenses. Anyone who declares ignorance to be a universal condition is a mortal threat to those who live by their pretensions to knowledge.

Well, if we turn away from the rhetoric of such disputes to take an honest look at our own lives and opinions, and then at the affairs of the world, we soon admit that Socrates was profoundly right. He has *this* much knowledge, whatever it's worth. People fool themselves and others about what they know, all the time. A

further recognition would be that while Socrates openly admitted to sharing in the common ignorance, he was not in the least upset by this condition. The Athenian world was having a hard time, but for Socrates life presented no great problems. He did exactly what he wanted to do with his time, and enjoyed it. He treated his death sentence almost as a joke, saying in effect to his judges, "You never touched me! You have only done ill to yourselves."

Socrates is a classic example of this ineffable sort of wisdom. We are constrained to admit its reality because other examples of it can be found in history. No "divine intervention" is involved. Human beings are capable of living such illuminated lives. The things worth remembering about the past are largely made up of accounts of this kind of knowledge or wisdom. But as Socrates pointed out, we can know something about something without knowing *all* about it. These things that we know something about—things we feel to be true and make the ground of our hopes—we speak of warily and indirectly, perhaps because we don't want to be asked to explain what they *mean*. You can't take these things apart. Their ingredients, when analytically examined, fade into nothing, as the Socratic dialogue shows.

There is a level of life (brought to reflective attention by literature) where we take their reality for granted, not through thoughtless assumption but because we *must*. A fine illustration of this occurs in Alistair MacLean's extraordinary war story *H.M.S. Ulysses*. In 1942 the captain of a British cruiser was convoying American supply ships from Iceland to Murmansk through the hell of submarine attack, a rain of explosives from German bombers, and the worst arctic storm known to man. He simply follows his orders and continues the convoy, even though over half the

supply vessels and most of the protecting ships have been sunk. A young officer, worn to the breaking-point by fatigue and exposure to danger, angrily calls the captain's devotion to duty "murder—or suicide."

"Why doesn't he turn back? . . . He's only got to give the order. What does he want? Death or glory? What's he after? Immortality at my expense, at our expense?" He swore, bitterly.

The old naval doctor he was complaining to was outraged:

"Shut up!" Brooks's eye was as chill as the Arctic ice itself, his voice a biting lash.

"You dare to talk of Captain Vallery like that!" he said softly. "You dare to besmirch the name of the most honorable—" he broke off, shook his head in wrathful wonder. He paused to pick his words carefully, his eyes never leaving the other's strained face.

"He's a good officer, Lieutenant Nicholls, maybe even great officer; and that just doesn't matter a damn. What does matter is that he's the finest gentleman—I say 'gentleman'—I've ever known, that ever walked the face of this graceless, Godforsaken earth. He is not like you or me. He is not like anybody at all. He walks alone, but he is never lonely, for he has company all the way . . . men like Peter, like Bede, like St. Francis of Assisi. Funny, isn't it, to hear an old reprobate like me talk like this. Blasphemy, even, you might call it—except that the truth can never be blasphemy. And I *know*."

Nicholls said nothing. His face was like stone.

"Death, glory, immortality," Brooks went on relentlessly. "These were your words, weren't they? Death?" He smiled and shook his head again. "For Richard Vallery death doesn't exist. Glory? Sure, he wants glory, we all want glory, but all the *London Gazettes* and Buckingham Palaces in the world can't give him the kind of glory he wants: Captain Vallery is no longer a child, and only children play with toys. . . . As for immortality." He laughed, without a trace of rancor now, laid a hand on Nicholls' shoulder. "I ask you, Johnny—wouldn't it be damned stupid to ask for what he has already?"

Where, when, under what conditions do you identify truth or knowledge? Is the ultimate confrontation with death during a terrible war an unfitting occasion for deciding what is truth?

Would the old reprobate know more about these things at ease in the wardroom, or before his hearth at home in England? Extremity, you could say, made him use the language of transcendence, call up Platonic essences to tell what he, somehow, *knew*.

Should such moments have anything to do with our definitions of "reality"? Is reality a matter reserved for the experts—the atom-splitters or the linguistic philosophers, whoever—or shall we say that old Dr. Brooks knew what he was talking about without knowing what he was talking about? Asked what he meant by immortality, he would probably turn vague, gruff or embarrassed. Ultimates cannot be isolated; beginnings cannot be known; realities cannot be boxed and delivered—not by theologians, not even by philosophers.

Yet what we actually live by is not negligible for us or any of these people, regardless of what they say. Socrates was driving toward this substratum—he is always excavating for it—and trying to provide some dependable approaches, but never mistaking a trial path for the destination.

There is reason to think that we are now entering a Socratic period of history—a time, that is, when the best of men feel driven to ask Socratic questions and to publish, no matter what may result, their Socratic answers. These questioners are not upset. In a Socratic age it is calming to try to think like Socrates. This may be the best evidence we have of hope for mankind.

Consider the measured statement of a present-day writer about the "illusions" of our time, published in a Canadian government pamphlet. The Socratic service is the needed puncture of illusions. This is a Socratic age because nature, foreign affairs, essayists, ecologists—practically any significant influence you can think of—are all occupied in puncturing illusions. In this pamphlet the writer, Ruben F. W. Nelson, says:

. . . the first thing we need to do is begin to understand deeply and powerfully the degree to which our present imaginations are misshapen and the process of that misshaping in all its subtlety and power. . . . such is our case. The temptation of Western man, and that surely includes Canadians, is that, in our desire to get on with doing, with building a better world, we do not begin to dream of the degree to which the commonly accepted rubrics on the basis of which we act flow from and reinforce misunderstandings of life.

For some time to come, therefore, we will have a much richer sense of the things we ought not to do than what it is that will sustain life.

This is the Socratic position and appeal. We can't even see what life is like until we get rid of our illusions—our "double ignorance," as Plato would say.

Why isn't it easy to take Socrates' advice? Because we have been taught to expect and demand certainty. Certainty has been the spirit of the age now coming to a close. It doesn't work any more. We once had calm in the presence of certainty. The certainty is gone and the calm has been lost. Now we are required to develop calm in the presence of uncertainty—the mood of a Socratic Age—based on a knowledge that cannot be said.

The Platonic dialogues are tools for obtaining this calm. The ones on the Sophists are meant to show that *they* don't have any real certainty, but are only peddlers of it. The *Theaetetus* is meant to show that *we* don't have any certainties, either, nor any good definitions of what certainty is, except that, somehow or other, it gives calm. Socrates himself was an example, a persuasion showing that it is possible to face up to the human situation without falling apart. His outlook has had champions all through history, a few in our own time—men who know the most while pretending to the least. What is "the most" in such cases? Well, they show a capacity to cope with life, and sometimes this capacity overflows in some very good writing about coping. For example, there is this from Ortega:

The form that is most contradictory to human life that can appear among the human species is the "self-satisfied man." Consequently, when he becomes the predominant type, it is time to raise the alarm and to announce that humanity is threatened with degeneration, that is, with relative death.

This is from *Revolt of the Masses*, in which, later, Ortega said:

The man with the clear head is the man who frees himself from those fantastic "ideas" and looks life in the face, realizes that everything in it is problematic, and feels himself lost. As this is the simple truth—that to live is to feel oneself lost—he who accepts it has already begun to find himself, to be on firm ground. Instinctively, as do the shipwrecked, he will look round for something to which to cling, and that tragic, ruthless glance, absolutely sincere, because it is a question of his salvation, will cause him to bring order into the chaos of his life. These are the only genuine ideas; the ideas of the shipwrecked. All the rest is rhetoric, posturing, farce. He who does not really feel himself lost, is lost without remission; that is to say, he never finds himself, never comes up against his own reality.

The Socratic—Platonic—world, then, is our world turned upside down. You know only when you know you don't know, or something like that. The *Theaetetus* is a masterpiece of persuasion that this is the case. Well, where does Plato get his balance and serenity, his capacity to look this unpleasant reality straight in the face and go happily about his humanly upsetting yet supremely educational affairs?

Dr. Brooks talked about immortality to reconcile himself and his companion with a far greater "unpleasantness" than our troubling insecurities. He sought roots in transcendental being. He couldn't define these roots but he found them. Plato and some others made an effort to order the search. He said in effect—think about these things, these propositions, these mythic implications, these heroic possibilities, and maybe you'll find them more precious, more sustaining, than what you now hold dear. Maybe, just *maybe*, they can be converted into your rock of Gibraltar. This happened for me, but I can hardly claim that as proof. What is evidence for me is

not evidence for you. I will never write about these things. So, don't ask me for "proof." Proof in *these* matters is always self-created. Any things I can prove to you won't help you much. But there are parallels in provable matters that might help a little. Mathematics, for example—the only method having proofs—shows you how the universe is built, but not what it is built *of*. It is both "practical" and highly impractical. It defines nothing but itself, yet is very practical for building houses and ships and bridges. You get a sharper sense of necessary order from mathematics, that's all. It helps you, as Pythagoras implied, to learn how to think.

So, if you go to Plato for starting points, for things to really believe in, he doesn't refuse to answer; he doesn't tell you either, but plays some sort of game. He wants his reader to discover by easy stages that knowing what is really true is not like learning how to build a house or a bridge. He talks in symbols, stories, allegories, and discourses on how the universe might have been made. Then there is this in the *Timaeus*:

When a man is always occupied with the cravings of desire and ambition, and is eagerly striving to satisfy them, all his thoughts must be mortal, and, as far as possible altogether to become such, he must be mortal every whit because he has cherished his mortal part. But he who has been earnest in the love of knowledge and of true wisdom and has exercised his intellect more than any part of him must have thoughts immortal and divine, if he attain truth, and in so far as human nature is capable of sharing in immortality, he must altogether be immortal, and since he is ever cherishing the divine power and has the divinity within him in perfect order, he will be singularly happy. Now there is only one way of taking care of things, and this is to give to each the food and motion which are natural to it. And the motions which are naturally akin to the divine principle within us are the thoughts and revolutions of the universe. These each man should follow, and by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the universe, should correct the courses of the head which were corrupted at our birth, and should assimilate the thinking being to the thought, renewing his original nature, so that having assimilated them he may attain to that best life which

the gods have set before mankind, both for the present and the future.

Well, as Macneile Dixon said, Plato is a hot gospeler, and this may be the heart of his gospel. It would take more than a skilled theologian to explain what Plato *means*, here, except for the simple idea that the same truth and thought that are in the cosmos can thrill through us, because we both *correspond* to the cosmos and are part of it. That's Plato's teaching.

In the *Theaetetus* Socrates and his friends talk about the mind as distinguished from the senses. A sense perception, they decide, is not knowledge. Knowledge begins with reflection about sense perceptions and about ideas which have another origin. All right. Knowledge, whatever it is, depends upon reflection. It is Plato's contention that there are three levels of awareness in man—three "souls," he says—and that these souls are good at what they are supposed to do according to the exercise we give them. We haven't space to detail the doctrine, but evidently the highest soul is the best side or use of the mind, needing for both exercise and nourishment the thought of the universe.

What evidence have we for this? A person could spend months collecting reports of what A. H. Maslow called "peak experiences." If you said to some one who had such an experience, "How do you know it was real?" he might look at you compassionately. Like Dr. Brooks, he would say, "I *know*." Who is to say he doesn't? What is this sort of knowing, and is there anything better or more important within the range of human experience? This is the knowledge no one can put into books, although its rhythms are sometimes caught by the classics, and great poets may echo its meters. How does one get in touch with all this? Well, you don't sit on the sidelines and ask for proof. The demand for proof at this level does little more than qualify a person to be part of the market exploited by the sophists, the packagers and peddlers of the familiar names of sacred and eternal things.

Instead, one ought to give the Platonic hypothesis a chance to demonstrate its value. How will we know when it does? We'll know. That, at any rate, is what some have said. Who, after all, would you turn to for answer to such a question? We are talking about another kind of knowledge—the kind that hardly exists except in personal verification. But it is also the kind of knowledge that floats as an efflorescent cloud above a culture or civilization—when an assemblage of humans deserves to be so named—and is accessible to those who reach up to it. One of its aspects is as a collection of stirring idioms and metaphors which, when you encounter one or two of them, make you want to learn the whole language. There is, you say to yourself, something really there, something that holds together. It is the same as the kind of assurance you feel when, after reading a page of Thoreau, you have to go on.

Is more explanation necessary? How does this "work"? It works by thinking. What is thinking? Thinking, Plato says in the *Theaetetus*, is the discourse the mind conducts with itself. And what is the mind? The mind is the part of the universe that can be tuned to every other part of the universe, depending on what you care about and really want to know.

How do you tune things in and out? No one needs this explained to him. We do it all the time. The mind moves around from radius to radius of its possible extent, traveling by various means, one of which is the leap of metaphor. A lively mind is continually making quantum jumps, finding similarities and taking note of differences. Where similarities exist, the mind feels at home, and where there are differences, it works at deciding what they represent and signify—and there may even be a metaphor for getting at that.

What is a metaphor? It is a unit of analogy or correspondence. Analogy and correspondence are the only means we have of extending the reach of the mind. Analogy lies at the root of every hypothesis ever formulated, as Cohen and Nagel

show in *Logic and the Scientific Method*. It is also the very soul of poetry—the line of the poet's imagery creates all heaven and hell, making the topography of noetic search.

REVIEW

MOSTLY QUOTATION

NATIVE GENIUS IN ANONYMOUS ARCHITECTURE (Schocken paperback, 1976, \$6.50) by Sibyl Moholy-Nagy is more than a picture book. The pictures are great and the book belongs on the shelf alongside of Bernard Rudofsky's *Architecture without Architects*, but the author's text is a distillation bringing the reader perspectives and questionings which go to the root of what we think of as culture or civilization. There's not much use in talking about the photographs—you have to look at them—but we can quote some passages to show what the reader will encounter in this book. The first few pages set out what ought to be the law of the designer's life:

. . . the basic task of the builder, the task which distinguishes him from the engineer and the contractor, is . . . the sheltering of man, his work and possessions in structures that provide spiritual as well as material gratifications.

The architect of today has a hard time holding on to this mission. He is challenged and confused at every turn by technology, economy, and a waning commitment of the public to cultural and esthetic values. There was a time when houses were built by unchallenged and unconfused architects whose ambition was total service to man. To look at their solutions might provide a much-needed inspiration without which no creative work, large or small, is possible. It might confirm the beleaguered architect in his calling as the artificer of form and space for the sheltering of body and soul. The academies are closed. The great unifying ideas of homogeneous societies no longer supply a natural common denominator. The architect of today is on his own. His search for re-definition of his role between function and expression must focus on technology and the human equation. Wotton, some three hundred years ago, spoke of the architect as "a diver into causes." It is he and no one else who must justify serviceable structure through the architectural idea. And this idea, this *first cause of architecture as shelter*, was and is the separation of human environment from natural environment.

This is the designer's purpose, but the circumstances surrounding his work have changed:

Separation from nature has become easy enough. Natural forces are countered by technological forces, from earthmoving equipment to air-conditioning, but the first cause of domestic architecture is still the same. Rampant natural environment as the perpetual threat to man's self-willed order has been replaced by industrial environment which threatens the matrix of human life with the same forces of chaos and extinction as did jungle, sea, sky and volcano. To provide *the home as an ideal standard* is still the architect's first cause, no matter how great and rewarding are his other contributions to monumental and technological building. The delineation of the place where man can grow, in spite of the dehumanizing forces of mechanization and de-personalization, must be the concern of the architect. He has to fight for it with the same fierce determination with which the land settler cleared his place to live in the wilderness. As those builders of old, the architect of today has to create *an anonymons architecture* for the anonymous men of the Industrial Age. Without new environmental standards provided by architecture the anonymous multitude will be unable to retain an at-homeness on this factory-strewn earth, and its morale will be broken.

Everything Sibyl Moholy-Nagy writes has this searchlight quality, united with humanist generalization. Her images are always fresh and stimulating, her criticism sharp and sometimes merciless, her intent the liberation of man in those particular ways in which the designer is able to make a contribution. We should add that every sentence in her writing is loaded with meaning, not a padded passage anywhere. Even the captions are composed with the same strength.

This is a week for quotation. From William Irwin Thompson's *Evil and World Order* (Harper & Row; \$7.95) we take some passages which show the kind of mental exercise required of its readers:

Now that schools and universities are merely middle-class public service corporations, minorities of the left and right and dissident intellectuals will have to go elsewhere for the life of the mind and soul. As

they try to escape state socialism, they will be attracted to Dr. Illich's anarchist capitalism, until finally government itself will give in and switch to the voucher system. Dr. Illich thought he was a radical, but he was merely the R & D wing of HEW.

Radicals are not the only ones who misperceive the outcome of their thoughts. President Nixon thought that in moving to create an all-volunteer army he was moving to demilitarize the country; actually he was completing the transformation of America into a banana republic. Professional soldiers have little difficulty in firing on civilian crowds, and army juntas have even less difficulty in taking governments away from the effete "pinkos." . . .

But there are even greater paradoxes in history than these. We are supposed to be a spiritual, God-fearing nation in conflict with the Godless materialism of the Communist countries. And yet Mao's China is built on self-sacrifice, hard work, frugality, Benedictine poverty, ecological respect for nature, and deep belief in the power of meditation on the thought of Mao. In Mao's Mary Baker Eddy version of Marxist dialectical materialism, if one has right thinking he does not need machines. Mao thinks he is creating a religionless society, but really he has created the largest Puritan state in the history of mankind. We think we are the inheritors of Plimouth Plantation, but actually we are the decadent Europe that the Pilgrims tried to leave behind.

Mr. Thompson cannot be disposed of by calling him a glib Olympian. His aim is good and the generalizations have substance. He invites his readers to reflect on the question: What state of mind, what sort of action, what conception of the Good enables one (or a society) to reject what is deemed evil without embracing it in another form? The proposition is: "We become what we hate." But passion, many of us believe, is the only effective engine of change. If you want to move the masses—and we have to do that, don't we, or stand convicted of elitism?—you must rouse the grosser emotions to which alone the masses, as masses, will respond. Mr. Thompson recalls A. E.'s rule that "all passionate conflicts result in the interchange of characteristics," and adds:

If one stops to consider the implications of this principle for the conflicts of the Second World War, he will come to some disquieting conclusions. Japan is now Los Angeles and Detroit, and Big Sur,

California, is a Zen Mountain Center. Germany is now a consumer society, and we are the largest militarist state in the history of the world. We have become our enemy.

What, one wonders, will moralists use for ammunition if this way of regarding angry appeals for righteousness should ever be widely adopted?

We have two more books for review that can have only brief attention, although they deserve much more. One is the second volume of *The Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois* (Selections: 1934-44), edited by Herbert Aptheker, sent to us by the University of Massachusetts Press for reasons we do not divine, since it is a work presumably of interest chiefly to scholarly specialists. The other is *The Passion of Claude McKay* (Selected Prose and Poetry, 1912-48), edited by Wayne Cooper (Schocken paperback, 1976, \$5.95). These are two distinguished Americans of the first half of the twentieth century, who happened to be black. They knew each other but didn't get along. One way of getting at these books would be to try to make one the instrument for review of the other, but since this would require more time, skill, and background than we have available, we suggest the comparison to readers. The resulting tensions might prove the raw material of some insight.

If you dip into Du Bois' letters, you soon realize that you are in the presence of a rare human being, a man of extraordinary energy, capacity, and determination. His impact as a sociologist was such that Robert Redfield, one of the world's greatest anthropologists, believed that Du Bois should write his own life story to represent "The Negro in American Life." In a letter embodying this proposal, Joseph Brandt said to Du Bois:

We would hope that you would not do a conventional autobiography but rather the kind of job that Lincoln Steffens did. After all, you have been at the heart of the struggle to make the Negro's place in American life one of dignity and withal you have kept a balanced outlook. We feel that you can perform a pre-eminent service to America were you to undertake

such a book. It would be in reality through you the story of the upward struggle of the Negro.

The letters of such a man are a study in the continual exercise of judgment, good will, and determination.

Why couldn't Claude McKay get along with Du Bois? And vice versa? A paragraph from Wayne Cooper's Introduction suggests part of their problem:

As much as any single man, McKay led the revolt during the Negro Renaissance period against the restraints that had traditionally been imposed upon black writers in the United States. In contrast to the innocuous plantation dialect of Paul Lawrence Dunbar at the turn of the century, McKay's militant verse after World War I breathed anger, alienation, and rebellion into Negro poetry. And later, in *Home to Harlem*, he created a raw novel of black lower-class life that flew in the face of the older, more genteel portraits of Negro existence in the fiction of Dunbar, Charles Chesnutt, and W. E. B. Du Bois.

While reading Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* as a young man shook McKay "like an earthquake," he later came to regard Du Bois as an "academician" who placed too much emphasis on the idea that a "talented tenth" among American blacks would guide the Negro masses to freedom. Curiously, Du Bois eventually joined the Communist Party while McKay, after some experiences with the Party and a trip to Moscow, felt that the Soviet's hand behind American Communism was a betrayal of blacks and all Americans; and he, in his last years, joined the Catholic Church. In conclusion Wayne Cooper says:

Unlike many left-wing critics of communism, McKay refused to become an apologist for capitalist imperialism. Although he had become an American citizen in 1940 [he was born in Jamaica], he felt the United States had learned nothing from the collapse of European colonialism, and he feared American world dominance after World War II. . . .

This collection of poetry and prose presents as a coherent whole Claude McKay's lifelong struggle to come to terms with himself, his people, and his world.

COMMENTARY

REPORT TO SUPPORTERS

WITH this issue MANAS begins its thirtieth year of publishing, making occasion for a brief recital of our hopes and a note on our troubles. We began in 1948 with certain principles and goals (see box in the next column), which haven't changed. One of our hopes was (and is) that the paper would eventually "break even" so far as finances are concerned. We used to try to figure out how many paid subscriptions would achieve this, but as printing and mailing costs kept going up, we stopped such estimates as futile and discouraging, and just "hoped."

Meanwhile, our circulation has been steadily growing, especially in recent years. The rate of growth is slow by commercial standards, but we don't operate by commercial standards, nor do we employ commercial methods of promotion. We grow by the recommendations of readers to their friends and by sending out sample issues. We feel that we know by experience that for us there is no other way (except for unpredictable "plugs" by writers and friends who say in print somewhere what they think of MANAS).

In other words, MANAS is now reasonably healthy except for its financial prospects. We suspect that in a "normal" society, even our financial condition would be all right, but the way costs are rising, these days, makes this virtually impossible.

This brings up another of our original "principles," a determination to keep the cost of a subscription down to where people without much money can subscribe. We've accomplished this, more or less. Our rates haven't changed at all (except for making no reduction when we adopted our two-month summer "vacation"). But now this policy, which we cherish, is becoming a real threat to our survival.

Consider, for example, the fact that every copy which goes to Canada (several hundred) costs five cents to mail, which means that almost

half the subscription price is consumed in this way. (This applies to all other "foreign" mailing, except for Latin America, which involves four cents a copy.) Speaking more generally, we now have to pay around nine cents per copy for printing, so that, even with volunteer help for wrapping, etc., and a peanuts level payroll, we can't come anywhere near to breaking even and need regular help to keep going. Well, we get it, or have in the past, but breaking even is still our dream, although an optimistic view of the matter would be that it may take another thirty years.

We're not discouraged—we sort of *expected* it to be this way—and plan to continue for another thirty years, at least. Meanwhile, we look to our readers for comment and suggestion.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

TO HAVE AROUND THE HOUSE . . .

AT some point in a youngster's life he or she begins to read what is found lying around the house—the books the parents have accumulated and the magazines they take. Ever since we read Michael Zuckerman's review of William Appleman Williams' *America Confronts a Revolutionary World* in the *Nation* for Sept. 11, 1976, we have been wishing we had a fourteen-year-old around who might happen on it and then start comparing what it says with what he learns in school about the making of the Constitution. It's not a question of adopting Williams' thesis or the reviewer's slant on it, but of the questions the review might provoke and where they might lead. For example there are these three paragraphs:

In the Revolution, Americans declared the principle Williams takes to be at once our inheritance from the past and our access to the future: "the revolutionary right of self-determination." In the Articles of Confederation they erected a government upon that principle, institutionalizing a diversity of distinctive sovereignties and addressing the future confidently and creatively. But in 1787 they "subverted" and ultimately wrought "the destruction of the ideal underlying the American Revolution." In the Constitution they dishonored their "central tradition." And the basis of their behavior was Madison's "intellectual revolution."

Madison undid the classical political presumption that self-determining republican communities could preserve themselves from falling into tyranny only by remaining small. He argued, ingeniously and brilliantly, that small republics were more rather than less susceptible to despotic usurpation. He insisted that wide geographic dispersion would serve rather than disserve the cause of freedom. And the men who made the Constitution in Philadelphia embraced his argument and set forth to seek an extensive empire for liberty.

The trouble was, as Williams says, that Madison was "a highly intelligent person who was as wrong as anyone can be." Expansion does not underwrite freedom. "Expansion is nothing more than a polite word for empire. And empire is the end of freedom."

Upon the adoption of the Constitution, and its substitution of a consolidated state for the self-determinations of separate communities, "the rate of *structural* change promptly dropped almost to zero, and the revolutionary outlook became increasingly conservative; ultimately, indeed, counter-revolutionary."

The rest of the book, Mr. Zuckerman says, describes the unfolding of that counter-revolution—with, no doubt, much truth in what the historian says—but what interests us here is the question of whether the Articles of Confederation were really better than the Constitution, and if we should decide to say that they are better *now*, whatever the Founders might have believed back in 1787.

In retrospect, and in view of what "bigness" (Williams calls it "empire") has done to the world, little countries seem in principle to be capable of a modest self-sufficiency and far better behavior. We live at a time when the charms of regionalism grow hourly before our eyes. Nationalism is in disgrace, or ought to be, and its goals, whatever was claimed for them at the end of the eighteenth century, do not and can not now secure the allegiance of the intelligent young.

Meanwhile, the advantages of limiting economic relations to areas with common interests and problems are becoming obvious. When self-sufficiency is developed in these terms, the practical side of life becomes manageable. The people understand one another and their needs, because they are close by and likely to share in them.

All this is simple common sense. Maurice Girodias has coined the term "Ecoregion" to sum up these natural virtues (see *Frontiers* for last Sept. 8), and there is a fairly large literature on the subject which students could look up. An early work, for example, is Howard Odum's *American Regionalism* (1938).

Big countries create and are active on the world market. Their economic power becomes a weapon in diplomacy, in which human need seldom plays a part. The manipulations of the

world market by the big powers may work incredible hardships on local producers, who have virtually nothing to say about the prices at which their harvests must sell. When the world price of beef is depressed for some reason, the small cattlemen in Colorado and elsewhere suffer. A man in Paonia said recently, "We lose at least \$50 every time a calf hits the ground and starts sucking." Arrangements like that are really monstrous, insane, when you come to think about it. What good is the "market economy" on a scale which subjects it to oscillations completely unrelated to local conditions? This is only a single odd illustration of the ruthlessness and inflexibility of large-scale economic operations. Informed critics could no doubt make a devastating case against any sort of "empire"—political or economic—if anyone still needs convincing that the activities of the nation-state have grown progressively anti-human during recent generations.

Such reflections may lead one to regard the Articles of Confederation in another light. And then to wonder if we had to grow "big," anyhow, if only to see how wrong and foolish it is—in order to recognize that the time has come to work toward another sort of social organization.

Is the "national" phase of human experience really necessary? Does it have lessons people need to learn? We have no firm ideas on this question. The issues are so blurred by the evil deeds of nations that it is becoming hard to see what may have been good about them. Perhaps the question seems unimportant, now, yet there are peoples elsewhere in the world who are today just entering the national stage, and finding it exhilarating and inspiring. Our correspondent in Nairobi wrote recently:

Nationhood is certainly a progressive trend in Africa. As in Congo, Nigeria, and Angola, tribal antagonism is one of the major causes of civil wars. Here we see the difference between Africa and Europe. Just as Africa is struggling to merge ethnic differences into national unity, Europe—in Corsica, in the Basque country, in Scotland and Wales, in

Croatia, and potentially in the Soviet Union—is trying to stem the vociferous demand for breakup.

But, he says, "When you go around Kenya, you can sense a tremendous pride in nationhood." Then comes the reason for opening oneself up to questions of this sort:

Right now it is still not clear what new social relationships and new values are emerging to replace the old. So what you get are tremendous contradictions between nation and tribe; between city and country; between formal education and education by precept and example; between rejection of age (there are so few old people in Nairobi, other than beggars) and veneration of age (the tribes are still guided by their elders); between diesel power and human body power. The contradictions are visible in almost every aspect of life.

Another magazine good to have around the house, and perhaps more appealing to the young, would be *The Green Revolution* (nothing to do with the exploits of agribusiness), issued monthly by the School of Living, Freeland, Maryland 21053 (\$6.00 for ten issues). In the back of the September issue are directions for building a low-cost solar collector. Teen-agers ought to be equal to this, also the parental wallet.

There is a fine story on community land trusts, which could be regarded as an American equivalent of the Gramdan movement in India. Both young and old need to get ideas about land other than the traditional "private property" conception—so misused since the days of the small farmer, for whom ownership was indeed a means to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

FRONTIERS

Historically . . . in the Middle

DURING the 1960s dozens of "underground" or "alternative" newspapers appeared, developing small but fanatically loyal readerships. Some survived, some didn't. Many of these papers enjoyed a brief golden age of radical magnificence, publishing worthy material that couldn't get printed elsewhere, and infecting various establishments with richly deserved anxiety. But to be at once a cause-serving enterprise and a venture with at least *some* economic stability commonly seems a contradiction in terms, in this society. If you succeed, you've failed. In a world as bad as ours, *of course* good things must fail! This way not just some but *all* failures acquire the patina of virtue. One remembers the days when it was often assumed that if a writer sold the *Saturday Evening Post*, he must himself have "sold out." Prosperous people are necessarily bourgeois philistines or "astute" exploiters. The poor are all noble. Statistically there may be some truth in these formulas, but radical analysis has an obligation to point out that the present function of statistics (applied to *people*) is to absorb or suppress exceptions, to smooth the curve, making scientific generalizations possible.

We have at hand the Oct. 7 issue of the *Mendocino Grapevine*, a weekly newspaper started in 1973 by Stu Chapman (and friends), in which this editor (and publisher) gives the history of the paper, tells how it has changed, and why. His account, which responds to the disenchanting but friendly complaint of an old reader, makes so much sense that it alone seems proof enough of the distinctive value of the paper.

A certain editorial self-consciousness is the foundation of responsible along with changing—editorial policy. As circumstances change, the applications of integrity alter. In this case the paper went from a "movement" paper to a general newspaper. Has it therefore been "spoiled"? We hope not. If it has, then the country is in a lot

worse shape than we thought. It is Stu Chapman's view that there are sufficient deficiencies left in the interests of the general reader of a general newspaper to give the paper a sufficient decency of its own. Seeing how this transition works and telling his readers about it is a practically unique service on the part of a newspaper editor. Who else could provide this peculiar insight into current cultural, moral, and psychological history? For a similar account we can remember only Daniel Ben-Horin's story on the *Phoenix New Times*—another "successful" sheet—in the *Nation* for Feb. 19, 1973.

In the late 60s and after, a lot of people who felt "burned out" by the strenuous activism of that period began, as Stu Chapman says, to yearn for a home in the country. In California, Mendocino County was often the answer, and many of them went there, eventually becoming the *Grapevine's* nuclear family of readers. As Chapman tells it:

Perhaps in its first few years the GRAPEVINE succeeded too well at becoming a newspaper for one segment of the community, a polarized and self-contained readership that was viewed with suspicion at first by the natives as some drug-crazed vanguard come to rape their land.

While it built a strong following as a community newspaper it actually became something much more than just that—it led people to believe that it was also community property—that the early readers had more of a stake in determining its direction than they had with other community newspapers.

For several years the paper developed in this way, fostering those images of being an "alternative newspaper" with strong roots in the so-called counter culture, running on free energy and donated services from people like myself who simply got off on doing it. We came to the country with some callow notions of what country living would be like and what we were supposed to do here. . . .

A good part of the paper was written by the readers themselves, people who felt they had something to say needed a place to say it, and could only find it in a paper that got by by the seat of its pants and bootstrapped its way from issue to issue.

That's how we put the paper out—bankrolling it with what we got for selling firewood in the city,

scraping enough together from other scams to pay the printer, keep the presses inked and rolling and the juices flowing. That and a full tank of gas was all we needed to go from Willits to Boonville to Elk to Point Arena, wherever someone was willing to peddle newspapers and listen to a wild-eyed rap about how they ought to push the GRAPEVINE instead of beef jerky next to the cash register.

I did that for several years hardly getting paid, lots of times wondering what the hell for, but doing it mostly because it was fun and I was just crazy enough to keep going and I knew there were plenty of people who waited to see that paper from week to week.

Leaving out a lot of Mr. Chapman's colorful prose, all this didn't—couldn't—last. The paper had to reach for additional circulation and the stability that comes with it. "We had taken the 'alternative newspaper' as far financially down the line as we could." The need, then, was "to become more accountable to a broader community and readership." And it did.

In effect, the question Stu Chapman asks his readers is: Are you sure that only a paper that can't survive is good enough for you?

No doubt there are borderline issues. No editor can possibly like *all* the advertising he feels obliged to run. You can draw a rough line, but never one that is really good enough. Which of the books the stores or publishers decide to advertise are too crummy even to be named in a reputable sheet? Which of the glorious "organic" food products are riding on slogan acceptance alone? And so on. If you sell advertising—as a newspaper publisher now must—you are able to exercise censorship only in the most obvious areas. The rest you have to accept. When readers grow sensible enough to support willingly papers without advertising—KPFSA, the listener-supported radio station in San Francisco, with sister stations elsewhere, was a big step in this direction in another field—then they will have their reading matter unsullied and pure. That will be a great day when it comes. (The MANAS publishers often think such utopian thoughts, since without the repeated help of gifts from readers, the paper would long since have expired.) So,

about the ads old readers don't like, Stu Chapman proposes: "Just raise the revenue these ads bring in so we can pay our printing bills and eat and we will eliminate those ads." Meanwhile, he says:

Yes, the GRAPEVINE has changed. But it is also more of a newspaper. It continues to be a strong advocate for directing economic growth in Mendocino County toward self-sufficiency and independence from outside corporate control over our goods, services, and resources. . . . I hope you will still feel a stake in how the paper grows toward becoming more responsive toward a larger readership and community—and that includes the base of readers we started with and the kind of news they want to read.

For a conclusion we add a little by Ben-Horin which gives another light on what it's like to be a counter-culture newspaper and try to survive:

Something that is a bigger contradiction than advertising vs. radical politics is the contradiction between counterculture lifestyle and newspaper-living lifestyle. We are a culture that eschews the 9-to-5, take your work home from the office, pressure ulcer syndrome. Yet putting out a newspaper creates a situation that is more intense than any suburban commuter's job in New York. . . . You have to think paper twelve hours a day, seven days a week. You have to be organized, efficient. . . . To stay alive you have to create an *institution*, a tough thing to do if you're into Woodstock . . .

Historically, I think, we're in the middle. Change isn't going to come without some form of permanence. But it's the nature of permanence of institutions that we have to change.

Stu Chapman seems to be doing something of this sort. See the paper for evidence. *Mendocino Grapevine*, 156 East Standly St., Ukiah, Calif. 95482—\$7 for 52 issues (single copies 35 cents).