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ATTITUDES AND ACTS

IN the Germany of today, a handful of highly intelligent and conscientious men are carrying out what seems essentially a labor of Sisyphus. They are trying to bring to justice some of the as yet unprosecuted Nazis responsible for the enormities of the Hitler regime. These activities are the work of a department of the court system of West Germany. Since 1955, when Germany regained her sovereignty, some 60,000 people have been investigated. In the eleven states of West Germany, 150 major trials have taken place, in which the defendants were charged either with specific acts of murder or with being accessory to murder. For almost ten years, 250 prosecutors have been working full time to fix guilt for Nazi crimes.

Hitler's Germany is a subject shadowed by immeasurable horror. Most people try to deal with it at a level of vague generality. But this is something these responsible and conscientious Germans cannot do. Why are there not more such Germans? Such questions haunted Hungarian-born Gitta Sereny, now a British journalist who contributed a two-part article on the "German Trauma" to the *Weekend Telegraph* for May 5 and May 12 (magazine supplement of the *Daily Telegraph).* Various historical writers have attempted to assemble elements of explanation for the most terrible historical cataclysm of modern times, with few pretending to any success. In the United States, Hannah Arendt and Dwight Macdonald have written perceptively on the question. Miss Sereny's is a later study which belongs with their work, although she is concerned with the problems of contemporary Germany. One thing becomes plainly evident from what she writes: The problem of understanding the crimes of the Nazis is more than a problem of understanding the Germans: it is a problem of understanding *man.* This point of view makes her work of value. An editorial note tells how she came to be interested in this subject. She was twelve years old when—

> On her way home to Budapest from school in England, her train was stopped at Nuremburg, and all the passengers were invited to hear Hitler address a rally. "The atmosphere was electric," she says. "Soon I was shouting 'Heil' with the rest of them." But when she reached home she talked to her parents about what Hitler had actually said and soon realised the dangers behind the emotion. "If I could work that out at 12," she asks, "why couldn't the Germans do it, too?" Since the war she has visited West Germany at least once a year.

For the series in the *Weekend Telegraph* she talked to a great many school children and youth groups, and also to men engaged as prosecutors in the courts. Among the facts which define the problem studied by this writer are the population statistics of German youth:

> West Germany has 60 million people. Thirty million of them are under 35. In other countries a man of 27 or 30 is an adult—in Germany the term "youth" must apply even to those of 35 and over. For the only valid point of division is who was part—and who was not part—of the Hitler era.

Miss Sereny testifies to a profound break with the past:

> But—these young are not nationalists. They are not selfish, overbearing or arrogant. Nor are they bigoted. They are not proud of being German; they are not given to dangerous ideologies, and of all things, not admiring the military mind.

Yet, she says, they are held—one might say "clutched"—by aspects of the past from the deep emotional need of vindication and reassurance on the part of their parents. Talk of the hideous past is taboo. To balance this silence, the older generation has given them extraordinary prosperity. A thirty-year-old business man told Miss Sereny:

> "They say of course, that they want their children to have what they didn't have themselves, but that's really too simple. I think subconsciously they compensate for other things: for the fact that this is a divided country; for the fact that we aren't supposed to have nuclear weapons, perhaps. In the final analysis, I suppose, for the fact that the children are Germans."

Another man called the material plenty a "kind of bribery," as if parents were saying, "We'll give you all this and you'll be proud of being German: You won't think of all the things you can't be proud of."

So the grip of tradition has this secret compulsion which operates throughout German culture. The schoolchildren told Miss Sereny of the enormous emphasis on right opinions, good grades, on being "successful," and, no looking back on or "explaining" the unmentionable past—a past which would force many Germans to reject themselves as they understand themselves. A perceptive Munich student said that all phases of the lives of young Germans are for these reasons *reactively* shaped by the Hitler time:

> "We see and feel the consequences of this past every day. We can't visualise it, and how it came about. And we can't reconcile to it, or for that matter fight the effects, because our parents' rejection of their part in it makes it entirely unreal to us. We must either brand them as liars, or construct our lives upon a void."

Miss Sereny's articles are thorough in the development of this picture, with many quotations to illustrate the psychological situation for both young and old. What emerges is a tentative indication of the practical limit of the human capacity to *feel* responsible without also feeling utterly destroyed.

There is of course the school of thought which maintains that people without enough capacity to feel their responsibility should be *made* to feel it; but how do you do this? Acceptance of responsibility is an act of the will. You don't improve peoples' "wills" by *making* them do anything. Punishment is something else. But even here there are practical problems. It could be argued—and it *has* been argued, by theologians—that an infinite crime should have infinite punishment: eternal damnation. What is the infinite crime? Offense against an infinite being—God. So, by a parity of reasoning, a proper punishment of the Germans, measured by the incredible dimensions of what the Nazis did—a table accompanying Miss Sereny's article shows that in addition to six million Jews the Nazis murdered two million non-Jewish Poles, five million Russians, half a million gipsies, a hundred thousand mentally ill, disabled, or aged Germans, and thirty thousand German "political" offenders, making a total approaching fourteen million dead—ought to go on practically forever.

But then there are the German *children of* today—or the thirty million "youth" of Miss Sereny's category—what about them? If we punish them along with the others, be. cause we don't know what else to do—and our *principle* must be preserved—isn't that a mild application of genocidal thinking?

Politics deals in practical solutions. So statutes of limitation on punishment are often found sensible. We stop talking about justice and speak of what is practical. Besides, in this case, we may *need* the Germans. . .

We know how political polemics jump back and forth between the metaphysics of punishment and other considerations such as "national interest." It is interesting to wonder what happens to the notion of "guilt" in such circumstances. Should "guilt" then be redistributed, and if so, by what rule of extension?

No long pause is needed to recognize the unanswerable character of such questions.

The second half of Miss Sereny's discussion deals with those whom she regards as really responsible Germans—men who accept the Sisyphusian task of combing Germany for Nazis, trying them, and convicting them if they are guilty. A Minister of Justice said: "You cannot say yes to

Beethoven as part of you, and not to Hitler." He pointed out that so long as men who carried out Hitler's purposes walk around free, they must be prosecuted. "If we don't call them to account for these crimes, we condone, again passively, what they have done."

These prosecutors are not popular in Germany. In the cities where they have headquarters they are regarded as painful reminders of an intolerable past, and unflattering things are said about them. One prosecutor said:

> "I see my family once every six to eight weeks, if I'm lucky. We live in dingy little rooms and have our meals in indifferent pubs. Our heads are full of horror and death. We have no personal axe to grind—at our age (he is thirty-three) there's no question of personal guilt. We now lead a completely abnormal life, only because we feel it has to be done. How can anyone believe that we would choose to live like this out of anything but personal conviction?"

The prosecuting staff sometimes argues with townspeople about the importance of its work. The people make excuses. The Nazis "were just obeying orders," it is often said. "Lies about our soldiers," is another comment. And, "They didn't know what they were doing."

"They knew," the young prosecutor said to Miss Sereny, "they *knew."* He told the story of a hundred and thirty-two SS men who "managed to kill 138,000 men, women and children in seven months by shooting each in the back of the neck as they knelt awaiting the shot. . . ." "That's what I'm working on," he said, and "living with now. Those are the men we try to bring to trial."

A great deal of important information is in these articles. For one thing, the men brought to trial in these courts are not regarded as "war criminals." They are murderers. The SS was a uniformed police body without military status. Its acts of violence were against civilian populations not involved in war-making. A prosecutor said:

> To confuse these trials with trials for war crimes is madness. The result has been that the German people combine these two categories in their minds. It provides an easy way out . . . they say, well, Russian civilians were killed because they were helping partisans, and the Jews wouldn't have been killed either if it hadn't been for the war. But it isn't true. They killed out of principle: the *Untermenschen*—the sub-humans were there to be used, or killed. They *said so.* It's murderers we are after. It's our duty to prosecute murderers.

Another little-known fact is that while SS men were hardened for their obscene tasks by training in routine execution, "There is not one single case where a member of the SS or anyone else who refused to take part in the killings, was himself hurt in any way, and quite a few did refuse." "We have their names," a prosecutor said. The men who committed the crimes, "although conditioned for it by training, basically were 'gifted' for it and did *not* feel 'under duress'." The only "duress" was in behalf of absolute secrecy concerning what they did—which explains why, although many Germans "may have guessed something of what was happening . . . so few really *knew."*

The men doing this work of belated justice have many frustrations. Criminal law, for one thing, was not written to accommodate the rationalized insanity which the Nazis made into a "social" system. The "desk-murderers," who condemned to death people hundreds of miles away, either by note or phone call, are sometimes hard to get at. There are cases where only "nominal" retribution is possible. A Minister of Justice said that at the very least, such men must be separated from public life "don't let them hold any kind of office." Then there was the case of a man, now a millionaire industrialist, who was an excellent administrator—still is, apparently—who during the war administered the "death department" of the Third Reich. He was sentenced to death by the Americans in 1947, but later given life imprisonment, and then released by a general amnesty in 1951. This man was recently driven by chauffeur to a trial where he had to testify, making a harried prosecutor say to Miss Sereny:

> "And *that* is what we have to admit as witnesses here. *That* is what is running around free as the air while we . . . and quite rightly so, for they committed murder . . . try their former underlings for individual deeds."

After showing Miss Sereny the vast records being used in a prosecution headquarters—including "reports in unspeakable bureaucratic terms treating the death of human beings not even as cattle, but as inanimate objects—not by number files but by weight"—a chief prosecutor said:

> But these dreadful numbers—14 million—they are not even the point, it's the basic insanity of categorising humanity that matters. How can we make our people understand? And unless they understand this at least, how can we have any hope of the future?

They try to make people understand. They give lectures, speak before clubs, and try in other ways to tell the truth about the past, but they gain little cooperation. So it is a Sisyphusian task in all ways. Miss Sereny says in a concluding paragraph:

> The fact is though that the criminals here, while vile and weak and a stain on the name of humanity as well as their own country, have basically become unimportant. Not only that: there is no penalty in law commensurate with these crimes. In the final analysis, any punishment handed out belittles the crime. What is important—no, imperative—is that their actions should at least be accepted by all the people of Germany for what they were: crimes of individual men, against individual human beings. The general recognition of these men's responsibility for their individual actions could lead to the essential acceptance in Germany—and perhaps elsewhere too—that any man can, but also must, bear the responsibility for himself and his own actions. The rejection of these persons by their own society could result in a redemption of sorts. If this could be made to happen, even at this late date, the integrity of those in Germany who insisted on the necessity of these trials would be vindicated, their tenacity rewarded. And the further prosecution of these individuals would at last become superfluous.

Thus the reality of "guilt," in this analysis, is as a symbol which serves in the recognition of individual responsibility, and when the responsibility is assumed, the symbol is no longer needed. This has the quality of a universal truth. It reflects an alchemical glint. You perform the Sisyphusian labor, which can never be completed; what makes it worth while is that it doesn't *need* to be completed; its value is achieved at another level of being, where attitudes, not acts, are the bearers of value.

This, you might say, is the higher pragmatic sanction for all activity "on principle" which seems to get nowhere at all, in objective, practical terms.

We know this well enough in relation to subtler undertakings. We know that we have to strive for perfection, but never reach it. As John Gardi said recently in a *Saturday Review* essay:

> E. E. Cummings spoke for all art when he described himself—in three equal affirmations—as "a man, a poet, and a failure." For to mean anything high enough and hard enough is to fail, to fail joyously. The triviality of success is in the fact that it can be achieved. The mortal seriousness of art is in the fact that it must reach for the impossible. The reach for the impossible is always a reach for identity, and in some degree for immortal identity.

Again, a universal truth. But what is the difference between the universal truth of art and the universal truth of politics and law? Well, in politics and law, after you have done your very best—*all* you can—there are final limits set by what other people have done and are willing to do. The imperfection here is in an external order of resistance and limitation. Having responsibility is a self-activity. Thus political definition of responsibility is by nature coarse and low-grade by comparison with the assumptions of self-responsibility. Political responsibility is always compromised by its mix of principle with self-interest, and by the threat of enforcement. Political perfection would be possible only for perfect people. Trying to *force* political perfection is the most prevalent madness of the twentieth century. Responsibility has to be invited; it cannot be forced.

The more you try to force it, the less you get. It is an attitude, not the result of an act; or rather,

it may be generated by acts, but only acts of increasing self-determination.

In his "What I Have Learned" essay in the *Saturday Review* (April 22), Salvador De Madariaga, a wise man, writes:

> . . . the appalling cruelty of Bolshevism and Nazism drove me to think again over the problem of violence in public affairs. One still reads in books written by honest people that what is wanted in this or that country is a revolution preferably with a capital "R" and preferably violent. I believe that this faith in revolution is utter trash. I do not say that faith in the aims or even in the results of revolution is trash. For instance, the French Revolution brought nothing but blood, tears, and delay to an evolution which, without it, would have achieved the same good results much better and more quickly. Likewise, if the American people had listened to Jefferson's advice on slavery, they would have spared themselves the Civil War.
>
> I am not saying that revolutions and civil wars should not happen. I am not arguing against political earthquakes. Revolutions just turn up. Men prove unable to get on with the work of collective life without enough of them sitting tight on their prejudices and privileges until another set of them loses patience. What I am saying is that we must not glorify revolutions. For a nation to say, "In 1789 (1688, 1784, etc.) I went through a glorious revolution," is just as foolish as for a man to say, "In 1946 I had a glorious appendicitis."

De Madariaga is not arguing for successful political events or achievements, but for *attitudes*—for the civilizing attitudes of individual responsibility which give a population the moral structure it requires for peace and freedom.

All political acts have a useful future only in terms of the attitudes they may generate if they are responsible acts. And responsible acts without responsible attitudes are simply not possible. There is a direct relationship between the German experience, and, in varying degree, between the experience of all the great powers of today, and this basic principle of social causation, which De Madariaga converts into political wisdom:

> A mass is not worth consulting, for it is a rough, collective female human being which longs for a male. It does not become a people until it is organized into institutions. A nation is a people conscious of itself. Therefore a nation is not the mere sum total of its individuals, but the integration of its institutions. It follows that direct universal suffrage does not conform to social nature, for it rests on the idea of mass, not of people or of nation. I am aware of the unpopular character of these conclusions, but I believe they happen to be right.

Hitler, at any rate, understood the first sentence here, and made it work. A people, as distinguished from a mass, is made up of human beings schooled in the conviction that their individual responsibility structures society through the freedom individual responsibility requires and demands. Denial of this principle destroys the alchemical work by means of which attitudes are created out of acts—and we know now, or have reason to know, where such denial eventually leads.

REVIEW
PROGRESS IN SCIENCE

THE STEP TO MAN (John Wiley, 1966), by John Rader Platt, is a good book on science for the reader interested in seeing how the constructive intellectual tendencies of the times are being reflected in men who are in the forefront of scientific research. The scope of the author's interests is revealed by the fact that he is currently professor of physics and a research biophysicist at the University of Michigan. One of his concerns is the physics of color and color perception, on which he has written some eighty professional articles. A passage toward the end identifies both the temper and the value of this book:

> Today science, from mathematics and physics on, is acquiring a more subjective cast. Biology celebrates the individual; anthropology emphasizes his creative role in ongoing cultural evolution. Perception theory is showing that perception is mixed with action, linking environment with self and self with environment inseparably. Psychology is seeing the brain not as the slave but as the director of its parts. And philosophy is teaching us that it is the *here* of being and action that underlies anything further that can be said about the world. We all recognize that it is our objective understanding of the world that has given us our power and achievements and freedom from superstition and fear; but it is the subjective that senses and verifies the objective, that touches and loves, that creates and pleases, and that we ignore at the peril of our immortal happiness.
>
> We have not always taught this, or believed it. Perhaps that is the reason for some of the great psychological strains in our society today. I think what we need to do to correct them is to cry out over and over again to ourselves and our children, "Start here! Start here!", until we learn to do it habitually, until by practice we realize again that it is immediate here-and-now perception and interaction and creation that is at the living center of things and that can alone give validation and meaning to the whirling problems and achievements of our times. Personal reality is the bedrock from which confident action arises. The adoption of an attitude of subjective immediacy, a Start Here attitude, no longer needs to be regarded as an escape from the world or as something bordering on self-delusion, but rather as a way of restoring psychological wholeness, acquiring a new single-mindedness and intensity, and appreciating and acting in the world more effectively.

Dr. Platt is plainly on the same beam as Michael Polanyi *(Personal Knowledge,* University of Chicago Press), although he may not have read him; too few American writers about the philosophy of science are aware of Polanyi's pioneering work—but there is a sense in which this does not matter, since the restoration of subjectivity is everywhere in the air. The thinkers of far-reaching influence on our time are all individuals who gain attention by looking at history, action, and life from some level of subjectivity which gives the reader opportunity for self-recognition and psychological understanding. Among the scholars who command attention by centering their discussions in subjective insight are, for example, Ortega y Gasset and Hannah Arendt.

Dr. Platt does some interesting switching back and forth between what we might call *wow!* science and reflective thought about the minds and attitudes of scientists. The latter is his real subject, but the wow material is fun. Professional librarians, for example, know that today each page of a book can be reduced 500 or 1000 times so that the entire book can be printed on an ordinary catalogue card. But another technique, called the microdot system, will go much further:

> In this scheme, a page of print is shrunk photographically down to the smallest size at which the individual letters can still be read through a high-powered optical microscope. . . . In this way, a whole sheet of spy data can be put into a "microdot" small enough to be pasted, say on top of a single comma or period, in an otherwise harmless text, where it may, often, pass unnoticed by all except, perhaps, the most gimlet-eyed observers.

But even this isn't all that can be done. The next page tells of methods under development in electron microscopy by which reductions of 100,000 times will become possible. By the use of tiny films we could record "all of the 20 million or so different books that are supposed to be

contained in all the world's libraries." These films would make a stack only about one-half a millimeter high:

> This means, as Feynman emphasizes, that all the written knowledge in the world could then be stored inside the head of a single pin. An ultra-micro-universalium. Hard to get at, perhaps, but what a pin!
>
> And if, as he says, the library at Bogota burned down, they wouldn't wail over their irreparable loss: they would simply say to the Library of Congress, send us another pin!

That's the wow part. But a few pages later, after exploring other implications of such recording devices, Dr. Platt talks about what really interests him: the problem of *selection. "A* universal man is simply a man who chooses and combines and refuses to be overwhelmed." Dr. Platt doesn't use it, but the analogy of the enormous reptiles of the carboniferous period, whose bodies got too big for effective use, has application here. Where are our "universal men"? Dr. Platt says:

> The reason we do not have such men in our time is that we lack confidence in our choice and judgment. We think we can make up for it by specializing and devouring. As scholars and scientists and philosophers and teachers, we get started in one specialty and often go on all our lives without ever looking around.

The rest of the book presents Dr. Platt's ideas for overcoming this problem. He talks, of course, about the practice of distinguished individuals, which, he thinks, ought to be increased. Most of these individuals and their work are illustrated out of recent scientific history. But in the section on social problems, many pages are devoted to examining the social insight and sagacity of the *Federalist Papers,* since the "Founding Fathers" authors of this political classic displayed the kind of intelligence now shown in the best application of scientific method.

There is considerable bite in his discussion of scientific practice. He tells, for example, of a meeting of biophysicists at Boulder in 1958, at which Leo Szilard observed that a man might do stupid experiments at the rate of one a year for fifty years in an attempt to find out how enzymes are induced, or how proteins are synthesized and antibodies formed, whereas to *think* how proteins are made would show that there are only about five ways, not fifty. A young researcher remarked that this was a question of how *small* and *elegant* an experiment could be performed. By this time there was annoyance in the group. One man objected to talking about "philosophy of science" and Szilard retorted: "I was not quarreling with third-rate scientists; I was quarreling with first-rate scientists." Someone tried to change the subject, but it didn't work:

> A distinguished cell biologist rose and said, "No two cells give the same properties. Biology is the science of heterogeneous systems. . . ." And he added privately, "You know there are *scientists;* and there are people in science who are just working with these oversimplified model systems—DNA chains and *in vitro* systems—who are not doing science at all. We need their auxiliary work: They build apparatus, they make minor studies, but they are not scientists." . . .
>
> As they were leaving the meeting, one man could be heard muttering, "What does Szilard expect me to do—shoot myself?"

This is a colorful illustration of some of the distinctions among scientists and creative people made more systematically by A. H. Maslow in *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Van Nostrand) and in *The Psychology of Science* (Harper & Row). Dr. Platt's comment is this:

> Any criticism or challenge to consider changing our methods strikes, of course, at all our ego defenses. But in this case the analytical method offers the possibility of such great increases in effectiveness that it is unfortunate that it cannot be regarded more often as a challenge to learning rather than as a challenge to combat.

Another comment:

> We speak piously of taking measurements and doing small studies that will "add another brick to the temple of science." Most such bricks just lie around the brickyard. Tables of constants have their place and value, but the study of one spectrum after another, if not frequently re-evaluated, may become a

> substitute for thinking, a sad waste of intelligence in a research lab, and a mistraining whose crippling effects may last a lifetime.

Dr. Platt sometimes seems a bit carried away by the marvels of scientific invention, as when he suggests that the horse collar made the Renaissance possible or that a one-cent birth-control chemical may prevent the loss of civilization. On the latter subject, he would do well to read S.P.R. Charter's thoughtful essay in *Man on Earth* (numbers 3 and 4 of Vol. I)—but we can think of no better recent book on the enlightened discipline of scientific thinking, and on the follies of scientific and other projects which cut themselves off from the feedback that gives both the essential criticism they need and the nutriment for growth.

COMMENTARY
A USE FOR ABSTRACT SCIENCE

ABRAHAM MASLOW'S book, *The Psychology of Science,* is devoted to showing the difference between science as the accumulation of reliable, verifiable abstractions concerning the various levels of predictable behavior, and science which studies the deliveries of immediate awareness, including the feeling-responses of human beings. This is not an easy thing to show, mainly because we have the habit of supposing that there can be no order in the study of subjective experience. So, Dr. Maslow's book is heavily weighted on the side of demonstrating that subjective science is possible, and that there can be no science in behalf of *man* without a conscious balance between these two ways of knowing.

A good example of the importance of this balance is found in an article by Louis J. Halle in the *New Republic* for June 10. His subject is the power of great states. His title is "Overestimating the Power of Power." Prof. Halle practices conventional, abstracting science in this article. The data come from past experience. He shows from history that—

> the more power a nation has the greater need it feels to use its power in order to increase its power still further. This may lead it, at last, into an open-ended and self-perpetuating process such as has caused great empires of the past to end in overextension and collapse.

This is an "abstract" conclusion about what happens to nations which depend upon coercive power for attainment of their ends. He shows that the ends sought by power tend to multiply in an order of progression which finally exceeds the power to achieve them. His earliest historical illustration of this "law" is Periclean Athens:

> The admiration and trust that Athens had inspired throughout the Greek world had brought it the support of allies who looked to it for leadership in the common defense of Greek freedom against the expanding Persian empire. So it was that, by the time the Persian threat had been contained and dispelled, Athens found itself possessed of a power that it did not, then, prevent itself from using thoughtlessly in a succession of individual decisions by which, at last, it reduced its allies to the status of satellites. When this unpondered course of action had finally, step-by-step, gone past the point of no return, an unhappy Pericles told his fellow Athenians: "What you hold is, to speak frankly, a despotism, perhaps it was wrong to take it, but to let it go is unsafe." In the end, the other states of the Greek world, driven by mounting fear of an Athens that threatened them all, combined to bring about the downfall of its empire and the permanent destruction of its power.

This is one illustration from history of the general law which applies to the blindly confident use of power by states. Prof. Halle provides a number of other illustrations.

What is he doing, actually, in terms of Dr. Maslow's idea of the two kinds of science? He is using experiential science—his immediate moral awareness and sense of humanistic values—to select the *relevant* facts provided by abstract or generalizing science. It should be noted that the resources of abstract science are for practical purposes infinite. This science affords knowledge in the same sense that a big public library does. But the books in the public library are of no value without the selective intelligence of the reader. The books may be worse than useless if their ponderous presence gives people delusions of grandeur. So the moral sense behind all true science, of which Polanyi speaks—and the choice of the *relevant* applications of abstract knowledge to which Szilard referred (see Review)—is indispensable. It is this quality which puts abstract science to work *for* man. Without it, policy-makers seem destined to put their short-run abstract knowledge (what they know how to do) to work *against* man, and, eventually, as it works out, against themselves.

People who stress the importance of inward synthesis, of experiential awareness, of unifying selection in the choice of relevant facts and processes, are not mere "preachers" or "moralists." They are scientists who deal with the nature of human reality and the laws which apply to human good.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

GRADES AND OTHER SIGNS

WE found at the bottom of a file a letter which discusses the uses parents make of their children, in connection with the "grades" they get at school and other measurements of juvenile excellence. Recalling "Children" for Feb 22, this reader says:

> Your comments on "The Fetish of Grades" made me think about an aspect of parent-child relations that has bothered me for some time. In talking of my child (and who does not?) with other parents, I note in myself a tendency to slant the picture, making anecdotes amusing, sprightly, and conveying by implication that such an original, intelligent, "fun" child—albeit lazy, unambitious, non-conforming—reflects the good fortune of parents who produce such an individual.
>
> It seems to me that we often make "conversation pieces" of our children, thinking to add inches to our own stature, then glide along on an upper current of self-satisfaction (alternating with depression when the child isn't talk-worthy), which leaves the deeper reality of the child's being unobserved. We "use" our children in this way, in a manner that does little credit to ourselves, and shows something less than respect for the child.
>
> Parents pass judgment on their children, tending to solidify the parental concept of what the child is really like. "Oh, Wallie hasn't got what it takes," a mother assured me recently, speaking of her thoughtful, college-age son who has in the past two years (1) worked at everything from baby-sitting to factory labor to finance a European trip which ended with a visit to a pen-pal of some years in Germany; and (2) quietly financed flying lessons for himself, despite poor eyesight, because of his interest in the subject. What Wallie's mother really means is that her son isn't full of the facile social graces of the "ideal" American boy. He prefers books to girls at this point, and is reticent.
>
> "Live and let live," our grandparents used to say. But we do not do this with our children. We don't let them grow at their own pace. The family circle, the natural environment of a child, should have a more objective inspection. While a child's conduct does reflect on the family—parental advice could often be given more impersonality, with conduct viewed from the standpoint of principle rather than as something "good" or "bad." How many family gatherings, alas, are an endless chit-chat of the minutiae of lives—"She Said, She Said," as the Beatle record goes. Discussion of what children, relatives—whoever—did, said, will do, ought to do.
>
> Your article spoke of "the unpredictable, intangible human qualities—resources of originality, humor, warmth and intuitive insight." These qualities, I suspect, may be silently appreciated, but they ought not to be discussed casually with acquaintances down the block.

Since grades have been mentioned, we might notice something said of them by William Glasser, author of *Reality Therapy*, who is often quoted here. In an excellent article about Dr. Glasser in *Harper's* for June, Jack Longguth reports:

> As he becomes more involved with the schools, Glasser is rounding out his theories of effective teaching. "We should encourage students to cheat," he has said, "if cheating means helping each other during tests. A test that demands facts isn't worth anything, anyway. Essay and oral examinations are the only kinds a human being should be given."

This article tells the story of Dr. Glasser's effort to help teachers meet the problems of the Los Angeles public school system. Along with applications of reality-therapy ideas, he makes extensive use of John Holt's book, *How Children Fail*, to show why it is that children who start out strong in school undergo change, losing confidence:

> "The critical age seems to be about ten. That's when children stop thinking." Then, he argued, "they divide into two groups—the squeaking wheels who rebel and the others, who have also stopped thinking but start grubbing for grades."
>
> Glasser sees little to choose between the two groups. "I'm not interested in turning the rebels into the grubbers," he says. "Too often all you're asking of a psychiatrist is that he stop the noise, not that he help you get the kids thinking again."

What is "Reality Therapy"? This article gives a good short answer:

> Work in the present. Don't pore over the records of an old failure. If his misery is all a person has, it becomes valuable to him and he will defend it.

Take away his reputation as a chronic bad guy. Each time he turns up with a problem, start by saying, "Tell me what happened."

If a patient tries to talk about his feelings or his motives, bring him up short. "I'm treating you for your behavior," Dr. Glasser will say, "not for your feelings. I want you to stop stealing cars. I don't care if you were emotionally upset when you stole them."

To the comment that "Reality Therapy is only Adler again, and fifty years late," Dr. Glasser replies: "I've never claimed that my ideas are new or novel. All I say is that people are listening to me and they're not listening to Adler."

A MANAS reader who works in an advisory capacity in public education provided the following impressions of Dr. Glasser, gained while he was active in a particular school:

He does not exude "self-confidence"—a trait I have been led to expect from the profession of psychiatry. Even before a large audience, his speaking lacks the mannerisms of a lecture or oratory. It is a "talking about" and an "exploring with." His humor is warm and personal, not the sharply honed wit which I—again—associate with psychiatrists. His forthright expression seems like a peeling away of the layers upon layers of adhesive double-talk.

His brand of psychiatric thinking seems to have a vascular connection with the "Now" generation—something that the older, more conventional forms of thinking lack. With children, he is just as direct. He simply looks on every child as a human being—individual and important in the scheme of things. How many adults in a child's life can have this characterization: No frozen prescriptions for dealing with problems. Just a kind of friendly groping—let's grope together and see if it will help. We've tried punishment as a method of teaching and it has failed. Now let's try something else. We teach children only "right answer" thinking, when we should be spending much of our time in the classroom with questions that have no right or wrong answers. Dr. Glasser is more concerned with helping people than with "professionalism." He looks as though his father might have been a tailor in a small, over-heated shop in a crowded Jewish neighborhood in the Bronx. He is the son who became a doctor, and by all the rules of the game as we know it, should be hotly concerned with maintaining professional status. But somehow he has skipped a generation in his attitudes, and there he is on the sidelines with the "Now" generation, calling out with them that the emperor has no clothes.

From others I hear that *people* like him, while professional colleagues sometimes hold their heads in mock horror at some of his ideas. He seems to be the same kind of a problem for everybody he troubles—he questions, exposes, and ridicules conventions precious to the older generation.

Fortunately, Dr. Glasser has some company in this.

FRONTIERS

We, Too, Deserve to Be Free

IN a recent broadcast over the Los Angeles Pacifica station, KPFK, Ira Progoff, psychotherapist, author of *The Death and Rebirth of Psychology,* spoke during the question period of the "seed" aspect of the growth potential of human beings. Helped by a listener who felt that too much emphasis on the role of the environment in the development of man has concealed the importance of his inner potentialities—which, he suggested, are part of the human "seed," and the seed alone—Dr. Progoff spoke at some length about the contrast between the authentic seed qualities in human beings and the self-images people take on from their culture. They try to become what they think other people ex*pect* them to be like.

This is not really a new idea, but its presentation by Dr. Progoff seemed especially fruitful. He pointed out that the really serious flaw in the self-images obtained from others is that they have no capacity in them for growth. They are not really expressions of the inner individual and they get in the way of natural, unfolding development.

One obvious explanation of this effect is that such conventional images have a stultifying uniformity. They do not assimilate to the uniqueness of the individual human being. They are not shaped by his rhythms, nor do they draw on the latent talents which really characterize him as a man. They are the stereotypes of the age. Trigant Burrow described the persona-masks which people acquire from the times, to the tragic distortion of their lives, and Ortega, in *The Revolt of the Masses,* wrote about the sterilizing effect on historical development of historical "gestures" or "pretexts," by means of which entire peoples are led to conform to images which have little or no authentic human intention behind them and cannot possibly lead to fulfillment.

This recalls another of Henry Anderson's talks on KPFA (sister station of KPFK, in Berkeley)—following up his "War on Alienation" commentary—in which he read from a statement by a SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) worker. What this woman of about twenty-five, white, and born and brought up in the South, says is a poignant illustration of the confining, frustrating, even mutilating effects of growing up in a culture that has become largely structured by "pretexts." The contrast she felt—so sharply etched in feeling as to have almost the quality of a "revelation"—between her own faltering purposes and what she saw in Fanny Lou Hamer, a Negro leader who has been a plantation worker in Mississippi most of her life, is expressed with a directness that is likely to be embarrassing to almost any reader. Yet it would be difficult to find a better example of the humanizing and even transfiguring influence which comes from acting from deep, inward perception of what one ought to do with one's life from having, as Ortega says, "a mission to fulfill."

Following are portions of the statement Mr. Anderson read over the radio.

* * *

Mrs. Hamer is more educated than I am. That is, she knows more. . . . Not if knowledge is the accumulation of information. . . . Not if knowledge is preparation for fitting into an automated society. . . . Not how to speak with congressmen. . . . Not how to endure pain. . . . [But] she knows more. She knows she is good. If she didn't, she couldn't sing the way that she sings. . . . She couldn't speak the way that she speaks—she *announces.* . . . I do not announce. I apologize. . . . this self-hiding and apologizing is true of many people. Even when they have plenty to say, the words with which to say it, and the sense of justice which demands that it be said.

Were we taught something Mrs. Hamer wasn't taught? . . . Did we learn something else in the schools, and the cities and towns? Perhaps . . . that we are bad? . .

I believe goodness is freely given. Man is good. . . . We were born "good"—about to announce, to be free. . . . If we are born "good," then "badness" is taught. Shame is learned. I learned it. Mrs. Hamer did not learn it, in spite of being a Negro in the Delta of Mississippi. It is learned somewhere else. Where did I go that she did not go, learn what she did not learn? . . . I went to society. I was there. And that is where I learned that I was bad . . . not racially, . . .

not socially, not guilty as a white Southerner, not "culturally deprived," not unequal as woman, . . . but personally, separately, individually bad.

Society—the whole thing—works so incredibly well, so subtly, so totally, that it is almost impossible to trace the course of learning badness. . . . Every institution has worked with every other institution to see that we are completely smashed as ourselves. Selves are natural; community is natural. . . . an institution is, by nature, unnatural.

Things happen in the family which [teach] shame. Little things—like not being told where babies come from and being made to feel "bad" for even asking . . . [and that] it is shameful to run outside without clothes, [and] it is "wrong" to play with this child and instead you must run and play with that child. . . .

The church seems to exist because of an idea that man is evil and must atone. . . . The church is a fully accredited, anti-human, inhuman institution. . . .

The public school system in America is so horrible, so sick, so damaging that many never recover. . . . Few children will ask creative questions, or act naturally, more than four or five times. . . . you learn very soon something is wrong with you to ask such questions in the first place, and confusion, conformity and shame set in. . . . No matter what you feel, you must act the opposite way—assuming you have [any] natura1 feeling left.

I enter high school. I am almost finished. I have learned to mistrust every single feeling I have. . . . I am guilty, repressed, and more or less schizoid. I join clubs. Make grades. Go to college for the finishing touches, and everything is reinforced. . . . I am not worth-while, but college is—so I give it all I've got. Maybe it will compensate for my badness. I emerge, I crawl out, clutching a diploma, a transcript, . . . a place in society. I fit exactly. I was made to fit. Sometimes I wiggle and stretch. I get smashed. After all the grades and honors, I am still guilty. Made to feel shame. I stop wiggling. . . . I write, but I never announce; I accomplish, but never live; I relate, but never touch; I am witty, but not joyful; and freedom is a kind of historical concept about people and governments, unrelated to me.

I do not even know I am not free. And my fellow men have no . . . idea what produces their concerns and migraines, their ulcers and their sterilities, frigidities and crack-ups ... and don't want to know. . . . it is a statement of miraculous and beautiful man that he has survived at all!

I was there. Mrs. Hamer was not there. . . . it is very ironic that segregation, in a . . . real sense, freed the Negroes from a society which enslaves the self. . . . To keep someone away from society is negative . . . but the society is also negative. Society, in and of itself, was and is . . . destructive. . . .

Mrs. Hamer knows that she is good. She does not believe that she is bad. She is not afraid to announce. She is not afraid to be free. Because, more than anything else, society did not get the chance to teach her otherwise. . . .

We are good. To live is to experience that goodness with others and with earth; to be joyful. . . . And we have the right to be free. Freedom is good and we deserve it. We, too.

* * *

To say much of anything about the foregoing would be like interrupting a prayer or separating people in love. Yet a shy comment would be that this, too, is an *announcement.* Its essential meaning is expressed by Ortega in rare and beautiful words:

> 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 around for something to which to cling, and that tragic, ruthless glance, absolutely sincere, because it is a question oft 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.