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LIFE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

THE will to be—or, put otherwise—the drive of life to establish itself in self-perpetuating forms, is the most comprehensible expression of reality we know. If you gaze at the ocean when a light breeze keeps the water in rhythmic motion, you may see some unidentified object bobbing gently. Without other provocation, the question arises: Is it *alive.?* Do its motions suggest some small degree of autonomy, some independence of the vast, absorbing uniformity of the surrounding sea?

Or, if you enter a room filled with people, the play of conversation has only the dull tone of familiar pageantry until someone speaks in an entirely unpredictable way. Then *he* holds your attention, because he is independently alive. The more what he says resists classification, the more he emerges as a center of identity—the presence of a reality which cannot be explained away in terms of external influences.

Nature is the theatre where life continually manifests in more or less enduring individual forms. It is the war of expressive intelligence against unmeaning entropy, of wit against the wear of natural dissolution. But is this struggle against death only protest, or is it also a kind of collaboration? For how could there be either birth or becoming without the opposing centrifuge of time, in league with primordial chaos? Yet this same chaos swells periodically with new activity, its passive calm impregnated by affirming life. This life challenges the reductive law of unity—a law which could not be recognized save for the synthesizing energies arrayed against it.

For human kind the affirmation of individual being is more complex. Men contest subordinately for physical survival, but their real struggle toward identity is in consciousness. A man's view of the world is largely a matter of personal interpretation. Depending upon his mood and circumstances, he may write of the cruel sea or the law of the jungle, while someone else will find in nature endless patterns of cooperation and mutual aid, as Kropotkin did. You could erect a natural ideology on the habits of each animal species—the one for sharks differing radically from the social theories devised by keepers of bees. And the habits and circumstances of men are even more diverse, so that deductions from experience can hardly have consistency.

Could there, conceivably, be a theory of life apart from such limiting conditions? Are there persisting uniformities of meaning which might one day dissolve the fierce barriers of nation and creed?

Well, men have tried to find them, and up to a point have been successful. There is a theme of meaning which is forever emerging in the reflections of men who use self-examination to discover constant principles of being human. Their primary finding, no matter how expressed, is awareness of self. Man is the being who is aware of being a man. This is the discovery which gives functional meaning to the idea that man is "spirit." The fact of self-awareness is not, after all, a material reality, and to speak in general terms of this basic fact about man is a convenience, enabling us to ask certain questions, such as what was spirit, if anything, before it became aware of itself? We hardly know, except for the fact that a man is *something* before he becomes aware that he is a man. Sometimes we deal with this problem quite practically by saying that he was a child. Psychologists tell us that human "growing up" involves slowly becoming aware of the difference between subject and object. Knowing that we live in a universe with the dimensions of space, time, and causality differentiates us as human beings

from the common flow of life, and creates fields of choice.

So, reasoning by analogy from what we know about our own development, we make a general theory of self-explanation. Our beginning is in undifferentiated consciousness. We are unable to say anything about this original state, since we can speak only of some kind of difference. To be, or to become, you might say, is to make a difference. And to be a man is to know that you can make a difference.

We ought to add that knowing this much about ourselves is only the barest beginning in self-knowledge. The greatest pain in human life comes from knowing that we ought to make a difference, but not knowing how to do it. And this pain is vastly increased by mistaken theories of human becoming which men embrace to avoid the penalties of being wrong and the terrors of acting alone.

Was there ever a time when men could trust the theories of other men without fear of being deceived? We know little of any such time, save for the legends of a lost Golden Age. As for the religious myth of the Garden of Innocence,—or Eden,—it is not yet settled who was the real deceiver: the god who wanted unquestioning obedience to his plans, without any torturing decisions (and hence no human growth), or the tempter with his alienating light on the difference between good and evil.

There is an analogue, perhaps, of the condition of primeval innocence in the total trust of a child in its mother. The mother is trusted by the child because she is not yet "other." The two have no separate, individual good. The test of what we call mother love comes only when it is time for the mother to cope with the growing child's necessity to "make a difference" on his own. What sort of schism is required by the health of the child who is becoming a man? Every parent knows the agonies of reaching an answer to this question.

One of our main difficulties comes from the fact that we have been instructed in the virtues in terms of "success story" absolutes. We know what we are supposed to admire, but we know little of the relativities of growth. Such stereotypic perfections seem impossibly remote from our daily lives, with the result that heroic behavior becomes the responsibility of surrogates. When the young, rejecting these symbols, try to invent their own forms of maturity, they often seem merely ridiculous, but the fact is that we have provided them with no field for natural human growth.

It can no longer be concealed that the young encounter in society what seem to them betraying institutions. If we had perfect institutions, they would reflect an unearthly wisdom in the progressive transfer of the right to make an individual difference to the growing young. They would be institutions constructed to match the developing capacity for autonomous decision. But they are not that. And quite possibly, the expression "perfect institutions" is a contradiction in terms.

Could we devise incorruptible institutions? Only if we first become incorruptible men, is probably the answer.

Yet institutions are surely as necessary to men in society as mothers are to infants. It is a terrible situation. Not knowing how to cope with it, yet feeling the imperatives of our moral absolutes, we make brave anarchist declarations of total freedom from institutions. We cannot apply these manifestos, but they at least give us the courage to go on.

The eighteenth century was uplifted by the dream of incorruptible social institutions. That's what a constitution is—an attempt to create an incorruptible institution. The writings of the Founding Fathers of the United States are filled with sagacious observations about the design of institutions which they hoped would be self-regenerating. It is difficult to apply "science" to the design of institutions. The growth processes

involved are those of individual human beings, which we do not understand—and, hiding this ignorance, we elevate to great importance various institutions in the hope that by some miracle they will solve on a collective scale the problems we are unwilling to face as individuals.

Today, two hundred years later, we are still puzzling over the problem of institutions. Their expanding services and invading requirements excite continual suspicion. Individual development and individual responsibility would free us from the clutch of institutions, but since individual excellence remains a mystery, the subject is largely avoided, and we concentrate on the statistical phenomena of human behavior, which can be related to even more elaborate institutional plans. And these plans, again, shut out and ignore the essence of the human situation—the mysterious, unpredictable process of individual becoming, of learning how to make a difference.

The failure of institutions to accomplish what we have expected of them leads to two kinds of pessimism. One, the commoner of the two, declares a low estimate of man and makes systematic denial of human potentiality. This pessimism resigns men to the rule of still more ruthlessly powerful institutions. The other sort of pessimism produces a rage against all institutions, and also stirs a desperate anarchist resolve that will accept no compromises with political authority. The case made by anarchist thinkers is based upon European history; for them the anti-human qualities of political institutions are experienced reality.

In *Of Fear and Freedom* (Farrar, Strauss & Co., 1950), Carlo Levi, writing under the oppressive rule of Mussolini, veiled his criticism of institutions with the philosophical idea that human life consists of coming into individuality, of arising through differentiation to the higher unities of freedom. He finds that institutions assume the deceptive role of promising individuation through what is really its *loss.* The control of men by external authority is a pseudo-salvation—the intrusion of the negative side of the original Chaos, which flattens out distinction and erases individuality. This external power can be accepted or rejected, but you cannot "reason" with it. Its necessities did not grow from the use of reason, but from organized fear of unpredictable, independent minds. Its creed rewards submission with elaborate pretense. As Levi said:

> Wherever the mass is really anonymous, incapable of naming itself and speaking, the sacred language of the state replaces the names, which have lost their meaning, by its own religious and symbolic names: these are numbers, tickets, banners, armbands, uniforms, badges, insignia, identification cards, ritual expressions of the fundamental idolized uniformity, and of the idolized uniform organization. Where the spoken word is made possible by the very nature of the mass it is useless to speak about the freedom of speech; the law's intervention may at most sanction the non-existence of free speech, and prevent its possible beginning. Those places where there is speech, the high and low Parnassi of political poetry, solemn or vulgar, the parliaments, debating societies and public meetings, the *salons,* and shops and cafes, lose their functions of giving expression to social relations and disappear. Mass-manifestations cannot be expressive: there is no place in them for diversity and thought, but solely action as passivity, necessity, nature, the weight of undivided numbers: the plebescite. . . .
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> Art grows into monotonous repetition, into a litany, or else it becomes a desperate and impossible groping for freedom nostalgia or hope. The sense is lost of living relations, for they are replaced by a single relationship, which is symbolic and arbitrary. Cities grow by peripheral progression, like unicellular organisms, and spread through the countryside like a shapeless liquid. Culture, which consists everywhere and at all times of a universal and absolute ability to make distinctions has no meaning at all, in the indistinctness of the mass. And thus, instead of culture, there stands its religious equivalent a totalitarian, arbitrary wall of confusion, which expands as matter does, by propagation, and which is valid not as a value but as a weight: *propaganda,* the culture of the masses.
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> Everybody is born from chaos, and to chaos may revert every man leaves the mass in a process of

differentiation, and in this shapeless mass may lose himself again.

The question is, *must* this be the effect of highly developed institutions? Camus attempted an answer to this question, but achieved only an intermediate reply:

> We want to think and live in our history. We believe that the truth of this age can be found only by living through the drama of it to the very end. If the epoch has suffered from nihilism, we cannot remain ignorant of nihilism and still achieve the moral code we need. No, everything is not summed up in negation and absurdity. We know this. But we must first posit negation and absurdity because they are what our generation has encountered and what we must take into account.

Well, suppose we do this. To Bertrand Russell's assertion of cosmic meaninglessness (in "A Free Man's Worship") let us add the contempt for man made explicit by the wars of the twentieth century, and admit the contempt for nature shown by the pollutions which weaken our eyes, erode our lungs, poison our water, and diminish our crops. Let us look at the twitching, mutilated body of our earth with a steady eye and ask again: Is this the only possible reading of the laws of nature? Whose is the nihilism which, reflected in our experience, insists that universal alienation is the law of life?

Are we indeed condemned to the ultimate loneliness of which the Existentialists speak? The world we have made is no Arcady, but are there hidden in it presences that might be responsive to sympathy and spontaneous affection?

The guilty admissions of modern intellectuals resemble death-bed confessions, and are no more fruitful of change. The Stoics, who were the tough-minded existentialists of their day, were capable of a warmer sense of companionship with the universe than their descendants in the present—men who call themselves "curds," denying any fraternity with the rest of life. Who is denouncing whom in these dark credos of negation?

Yet if the pressure of heroic longing—the will to make a difference—can find expression only in defiance of a world compounded of layers of alienation, we ought perhaps to welcome it, as an indispensable preliminary to new attempts to make friends with the world. The dignity of nature can hardly be restored except by the slow revival of kinships which belong to the dignity of man, and we have the bad habits of several hundred years of history to reverse. How long will it take to teach a wild creature that it can now *trust* a human being? Or men that they can trust each other?

Meanwhile, what shall we teach our children about the living world? What gospels should be given to those who were but lately babes in arms? What are the intermediate stages of instruction between unquestioning trust and heroic individual responsibility? Deeper motives than scholarly curiosity may be behind the present study of ancient tribal customs of initiation, with graded introduction to the responsibilities of community life. There *mus*t be natural ways of leading the young through the maze of contradictions of an institutional society.

Modern investigations of the development of moral attitudes in the young disclose a process of displacement and replacement of loyalties—the narrow by wider allegiances. How can this process go on in the face of rigid definitions of righteousness made by men who were never taught to question themselves?

It is probably quite futile to attempt to apply an evolutionary or living-growth theory of human development to social arrangements constructed mainly from fear of evil according to a sin-and-salvation theory of human life. Contradictions beset us at every step, and compromises with the past are almost always efforts to cure with institutions the ills or immaturities that make institutions necessary. This cannot possibly work. It would be far better to recognize the inevitable ambiguity of all institutions—the fact that every relationship of trust is also a relationship in which betrayal is possible. There is no final remedy for

the abuse of trust except from the growth of human beings into deepening responsibility.

What else might help? Well, some attention could be given to the development of a new heroic literature; for this, poets and myth-makers will need to be able to conceive of human beings in ways not dependent on statistical images of man.

The man of the masses, whom we pity rather than love, is always man as a victim. He is the type of passive humanity, the man to whom bad things are forever being done by wicked institutions. We have a vast literature condemning the crimes against him. It puts us in a rage. Yet never has good been born only from revulsion. Never has righteous wrath brought forth a garden or built a school in which children are permitted to grow into free men.

The secret of a new heroic literature would lie in intimating the means to create community through individuality, instead of by the methods of suppression and constraint. But what *is* individuality? That is what so many try to tell us, but which nobody really knows. Carlo Levi protected his thought from exploitation by using an obscure abstraction: True human individuality is born when "the two contrary processes of differentiation and undifferentiation find a common point of equilibrium and are coexistent in the creative act."

How do we recognize the creative act? Well, it has an intangible flow of meaning far beyond what the actor was able to say. We feel and thrill to unspoken possibility, the new portal into the unknown.

The creative act generates lines of force in the void. It adds to the field of transcendent being. It turns the beyond of yesterday into the here of today, but without making the stuff of eternity captive o£ any finite present. The creative act is always done anew, or there could be no transcendence for children, and all achievement would be in the past. Becoming is the timeless reality that goes on all the time.

REVIEW
THE USES OF IGNORANCE

THE attractions of great literature are twofold. First, there is the compelling appeal of the work of men who know something, and know that they know. Then there is the equally important contribution of those who recognize their own ignorance, and become able to turn it into the tool and testing ground of truth.

The survival of Platonic philosophy, periodically reborn in inquiring minds, is no doubt due to the presence of both these capacities. Plato's insistence on *value* as the primary consideration in the search for truth produces a confirming resonance in his readers, while the critical method of Socrates becomes a protection against the enthusiasms of unquestioning faith. It isn't that Plato becomes an "authority," but that the most fruitful thinking seems patterned after his example: you say something that you think may be true, and then you test it by comparison, gradually learning how either to limit or to extend the meaning of what you have said, and getting, in the process, a sense of fitness concerning what ought to be left open or unsaid.

But is truth a private or a public thing? Well, the possession of it, and also, in some respects, the pursuit of it, may be a private thing, but the communication of it—and the gaining of agreement with it—is at least partly a public thing. So, at this level, the level of communication, truth has to be recognized as existing through the assent of other people, few or many. But the assent does not make it truth; assent may be a condition of the common apprehension, but this does not make what is assented to true. A popular opinion may be quite false. Indeed, a major obstacle in the pursuit of truth lies in the fact that many or most common opinions about what is true are likely to be false.

This situation makes a dilemma for the man who is drawn to admire the figure of Socrates. *Why* does he admire Socrates?

Well, Socrates stood up for what he believed, no matter what. He had courage. He told. the truth as he saw it. He tried to get people to think for themselves.

There is also a tradition that we are *supposed* to admire Socrates. It may be a good tradition, but following tradition is no help to a man who wants to find out what he really thinks. It is obvious that many people who say they admire Socrates would, in the same circumstances, do the opposite of what Socrates did. Socrates, by any ordinary standard, behaved like a fool during his trial. He first annoyed and then insulted his judges when he didn't have to. Only a little prudence would have saved his life. He knew the value of prudence, and had practiced it in his earlier life, but he cast prudence away during his trial, when he really needed it. He gave, of course, an explanation for this. He was too old, he said, to care about prudential considerations. He felt that the gain that might come about through his dying would be more valuable than a few more years of life. Not even his close friends understood this distinction. They couldn't *feel* the good he was talking about. So, since he was unable to make people feel as he did, he left them confronted by a sample of incredible behavior in a man they loved and admired. This might make them think.

From the way Socrates spent his life one might deduce his theory of education. It would be something like this. Only a very small number of people are ready for the uncompromising pursuit of truth. To find them, a teacher has to make a wild assumption: that any man he may happen to talk to *might* be ready to search for the truth. If you follow Socrates, you make this risky assumption and accept its consequences—there is nothing else to do. If asked why you pursue this foolhardy course, you explain, as Plato explained in the *Republic,* that while there is little likelihood of many men becoming philosophers, that small margin of likelihood is the only place where a man who loves philosophy can work. This is the only conception of human progress that agrees with

reason. Men of this persuasion seldom change their view, even though, when the multitude finds out what they mean—they are recommending a course of action whose benefits the multitude cannot *feel*—they are almost certain to be punished severely for their pains. As Plato said in the *Gorgias,* Socrates was like a doctor tried by a jury of children and a cook.

What reasons have we to believe that this minority report on the means to human progress is a true one? Reasons exist, and have been given, but their persuasiveness varies, depending upon obscure subjective factors in human beings. Plato, for example, would probably say that a man's judgment about what is true rests, ultimately, upon what sort of love he has brought to the inquiry.

Perhaps, for the most part, we continue to admire our great men and to be fascinated by their whole-hearted commitment to transcendent ideals because we can't help it—even though we aren't able to feel what they feel. If we felt as they do, we might he heroes all.

But this is ridiculous! A theory of knowledge and of education or progress which leads, almost certainly, to martyrdom is intolerable. What we need, and ought to get, is a body of truth which is so unmistakable that no one will want or care to reject it. Let us establish public canons of certainty. With science as our guide, we shall have no more sacrifices to popular prejudice.

This is the "enlightened" view which, for all its humanitarian pretensions, distinguishes the labors of the churches and of scientific establishments from the efforts of philosophers. For the fact is that men who want absolute certainty always arrive at it too easily or too soon.

What do the men who demand unmistakable knowledge do? They may start out humbly, testing as they go along, but the time comes when the excitements of the development of narrow but wonderful skills sweeps them into power, and then they take over the management of society.

What do the philosophers do? Avoiding power like the plague, they start schools. The chief negative truth about certainty taught by these schools is that there is no certainty in heaven or earth so sure as to justify running another man's life for him, or taking another man's life away from him. Jesus, Buddha, Pythagoras—and, in modern times, Tolstoy, who also started a school—all maintained something like this,; along with other teachings of a more positive character.

Tolstoy, who was tortured all his life by honest uncertainties, turned his doubt into art. In *War and Peace,* which has for its philosophical setting the obscurity of causation in history, Tolstoy became a brilliant iconoclast of conventional belief. He knew his own ignorance, from years devoted to trying to dispel his own doubts, and he used the resulting insight to inform his great novel. In an essay on *War and Peace* (*The Hedgebog and the Fox,* Mentor), Isaiah Berlin shows how Tolstoy turned his critical powers against the claims of the scientific historians:

> The proposition that history could (and should) be made scientific is a commonplace in the nineteenth century, but the number of those who interpreted the term "science" as meaning natural science, and then asked themselves whether history could be transformed into a science in this specific sense, is not great. . . . Like Marx (of whom at the time of writing *War and Peace* he apparently knew nothing) Tolstoy saw clearly that if history was a science, it must be possible to discover and formulate a set of true laws of history which, in conjunction with the data of empirical observation, would make prediction of the future (and "retrodiction" of the past) as feasible as it had become, say, in geology or astronomy. But he saw more clearly than Marx and his followers that this had, in fact, not been achieved, and said so with his usual dogmatic candor, and reinforced his thesis with arguments designed to show that the prospect of achieving this goal was nonexistent, and clinched the matter by observing that the fulfillment of this scientific hope would end human life as we know it. . . .
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> But what oppressed Tolstoy was not merely the "unscientific" nature of history . . . he further thought that he could not justify to himself the apparently

> arbitrary selection of material, and the no less arbitrary distribution of emphasis, to which all historical writing seemed to be doomed. He complains that while the factors which determine the life of mankind are very various, historians select from them only some single aspect, say the political or the economic, and represent it as primary, as the efficient cause of social change; but then, what of religion, what of "spiritual" factors, and the many other aspects—a literally countless multiplicity—with which all events are endowed? . . .
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> Tolstoy's bitterest taunts, his most corrosive irony are reserved for those who pose as official specialists in managing human affairs, in this case the Western military theorists. . . . these men must be impostors since no theories can possibly fit the immense variety of possible human behavior, the vast multiplicity of minute, undiscoverable causes and effects which form that interplay of men and nature which history purports to record. Those who affect to be able to contract this infinite multiplicity within their "scientific" laws must be either deliberate charlatans, or blind leaders of the blind. The harshest judgment is accordingly reserved for the master theorist himself, the great Napoleon, who acts upon, and has hypnotized others into believing, the assumption that he understands and controls events by his superior intellect, or by flashes of intuition, or by otherwise succeeding in answering correctly the problems posed by history. The greater the claim, the greater the lie; Napoleon is consequently the most pitiable, the most contemptible of all the actors in the great tragedy.

What was Tolstoy's own conclusion, in the presence of the inability of men to interpret with any certainty the course of history, the needs of "destiny"? Tolstoy said, in effect, that if we are too ignorant to manage, we can at least refuse to harm. And men of ability can refuse to mislead others with pretended certainties that later history is sure to expose.

COMMENTARY
THE WAY OF PROGRESS

THE optimism of Teilhard de Chardin's doctrine of the evolving "noosphere"—a kind of natural mind-stuff which will nourish the mature humanity of the future—needs qualification by recognition of the various "easy way" substitutes for genuine human evolution: the ideologies and theological systems devised by men who are persuaded that the great majority of people need to be *told* what to believe and how to live their lives.

The quotation from Carlo Levi in this week's lead article illustrates the operation of a pseudo-noosphere. The counterfeit securities of an imposed belief seep into men's minds, withering the growing-tips of independent intelligence, which sprout only in individuals. A man who is led to believe that he can find his way by following somebody else stops being an individual.

There is of course an element of paradox here. A man can learn by following the example of another man who is convinced that there is no such thing as secondhand truth. You follow such a man by not following him. But for people who have been taught to find security in imitation, his example is filled with frustration and threat. He is a *teacher,* not a leader or an expert. He spends much of his time exposing the uselessness of imitations. "Maggie," in Lillian Rubin's story of the jail experience at Santa Rita (see Frontiers), was acting as a teacher instead of a leader when she "tried to challenge the racial attitudes and behavior of the group." She wouldn't accept a collectivist image of black people.

Most of the theories of progress we have grown up with are based upon collectivist imagery. According to these theories, progress is accomplished by specialists who are continually improving the patterns of human life and planning the future. The people are supposed to fit themselves into these beneficial innovations. The planners hope that the people will do this willingly, but they are going to *have* to do it, sooner or later. No one can be permitted to stand in the way of progress.

But this is too simple a criticism. Some conformities are now almost practical necessities. A lot of people, for example, are going to drive automobiles without understanding the dynamics of the internal combustion engine. In our society, at any rate, there is an enormous amount of technical dependence.

And it is certainly true that copying another man's technical competence in relation to the management of things is very different from copying faithfully his plan for moral behavior. Obeying the unambiguous laws of matter without understanding them personally won't harm a man much, so long as he realizes that he is relying on borrowed information.

It is the *habit* of using borrowed knowledge that can ruin our lives. How to live a human life is not a matter of technical information. A true noosphere will *not* be evolved by some people for the use and guidance of others. It will not be the creation of experts. People who imagine that they can tell other people what they ought to do as human beings are not experts at anything but dehumanization.

This basic principle seems obvious enough, although its application is subject to a lot of relativities. For one thing, we don't go far wrong when we say that people ought not to kill one another. And it seems right to say that people ought not to deceive one another. But difficult subtleties soon complicate the simplicity of an externalizing moral code.

Is it "deception" not to tell a child about something his experience has not fitted him to understand? Jesus spoke in parables to the multitude. Was he "deceiving" all those people?

And does a parable convey more or less truth than the "real facts"?

Anyhow, who knows the real facts from the ones that aren't quite so "real"?

Did the scientists come upon some "real facts" when they discovered the secret of nuclear fission?

What do you say about this kind of "reality"? Is power over processes that give death and destruction evidence that people have found out "real facts"? Or should we put all those brilliant people away for giving this power to ambitious or fearful men?

Well, even if we can't answer questions like these, are we really willing to let the scientists take charge of our "noosphere"? Robert Oppenheimer, one of the most distinguished of their number, thought they had taken charge of sin.

An expert in being human might be regarded as a man who has found reasons for not getting too far ahead of anyone else. How could he *love* his fellows from such a distance?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

A CHILD-WATCHER

WHEN, in 1928, Moholy-Nagy felt the growing pressure to increase "production" in his work at the Bauhaus, he resigned. But since the Banhaus was conceived to have a close relation to industry—was originated, in fact, to elevate and even "ensoul" the products of industry—he felt it necessary to make an explanation. In his letter of resignation he said:

> Basically, one can't object if human power wants to measure itself on the object, trade. This belongs essentially to the Bauhaus program. But one must see the danger of losing equilibrium, and meet it. As soon as making an object becomes a specialty, and work becomes trade, the process of education loses all vitality. There must be room for teaching the basic ideas which keep human content alert and vital. For this we fought and for this we exhausted ourselves. I can no longer keep up with the stronger and stronger tendency toward specialization in the workshops.
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> We are now in danger of becoming what we as revolutionaries opposed: a vocational school which evaluates only the final achievement and overlooks the development of the whole man. For him there remains no time, no money, no space, no concession. . . . The school today no longer swims against the current. It tries to fall into line. This is what weakens the power of the unit. Community spirit is replaced by individual competition, and the question arises whether the existence of a creative group is only possible on the basis of opposition to the *status quo*.

The effects on the young of the "cash-in" mania in education have since become well known. It shrivels them as human beings. It makes children judge themselves by comparison with others, stimulating envy, selfishness, competition and greed. It dulls the higher faculties of the human mind. Teachers—some of them—have been saying this for years but they were not heard; and today a great many of the young no longer wish to be "educated." Some of them have found strange pied pipers to listen to, and businessmen complain that the brightest college students are refusing well-paying jobs in industry.

But what happens when the other policy is followed? What is meant by keeping "human content alert and vital"? In *How Children Learn* (Pitman, 1967), John Holt tells a story about a group of children of kindergarten age. It goes a long way toward proving Moholy-Nagy's point:

> Bill Hull and some other friends of mine were developing a very ingenious and powerful set of mathematical and logical materials (now produced by the McGraw-Hill Book Company in St. Louis, Mo.) called Attribute Blocks or A-blocks. These are a set of wooden blocks, of various colors, sizes, and shapes, with which the children can play a wide variety of classifying games, and with which they can do a great many things that experts on such matters have said they would be unable to do.
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> They developed these materials by having small groups of young children, mostly five-year-olds, come into their office-lab-classroom and work with them, that is, play various games, do puzzles, solve problems. (Some of the games now incorporated into the unit were invented by the children.) They found a very interesting thing about the way children reacted to these materials. If, when a child came in for the first time they tried to get him "to work" right away, to play some of their games and solve some of their puzzles, they got nowhere. The child would try to do what he was asked to do, but without joy or insight. But if at first they let the child alone for a while, let him play with the materials in his own way, they got very different results. At first, the children would work the pieces of wood into a fantasy. Some pieces would be mommies and daddies, some children; or they would be horses and cars; or big animals and little animals. Then the children would make various kinds of patterns, buildings, and constructions out of the pieces of wood. When, through such play and fantasy, the children had taken these materials into their minds, mentally swallowed and digested them, so to speak, they were then ready and willing to play very complicated games, that in the more organized and businesslike situation had left other children completely baffled. This proved so consistently true that the experimenters made it a rule always to let children have a period of completely free play with the materials, before asking them to do directed work with them.

Well, what happened, really? The children's play seems very much like the creative designer's predesigning reverie, his need for uncalculating, non-utilitarian wonder. An acquisitive push turns these qualities off. An ulterior motive stifles the imagination. Living forms require limit, but they do not grow when spurred by anxiety or acquisitive demands. The play of the children, it seems, is very like what Michael Polanyi calls "interiorization" in *The Tacit Dimens*ion. Progress in knowing depends upon it. Involved is a kind of savoring of all the facets of a new experience, an inhabiting of it, a living in it, until it becomes almost an extension of one's being. After this has taken place, the child—or man—is able to think naturally of its potentialities.

Sometimes necessity is the mother of many kinds of interiorization. Mr. Holt tells about the one-room country school taught by Julia Weber (and described in her book, *My Country School Diary* "Harper]). She taught all eight grades, and sometimes all the children together as a single class. Questions left unsettled in these large class discussions were written on large sheets of paper; they weren't "assignments" of work, just unanswered questions. Curious children would pursue them for fun. Mr. Holt relates:

> One such question came up early one spring, when the children were getting ready to put away their winter clothes. The clothes had to be cleaned before they were put away, and someone asked why they couldn't be washed. Many of them knew that it was because the wool would shrink. But why did wool shrink, and what happened to it when it shrank? Nobody knew. Perhaps they could find out if they looked at wool through a microscope. Unfortunately, they didn't have a microscope, and couldn't possibly afford to buy one. All right, they would borrow one. They wrote a letter—I believe it was to a state university—asking if they could borrow a microscope, and explaining what they wanted to use it for. Incidentally, the children always wrote such letters, and they were writing them all the time, since their tiny school had to borrow most of the books and equipment they needed.
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> Here, it seems to me, is the answer to the current superstition, made fashionable by Dr. Conant and others, that we have to have giant school factories, because we can't get good education in a school unless it has all the latest equipment. In making our schools ever larger we have lost more of value than we have gained, and what little we have gained by having all this expensive material in each school, we might well have accomplished in other ways. There could have been, as in some parts of the country there still are, central libraries from which books or equipment could be borrowed, or mobile libraries and laboratories that visit schools in turn. Some day if we get over our notion that bigness in education means efficiency and quality we may revive some of those ideas.

FRONTIERS

Notes on "Race"

THE *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*—often called the Kerner Report, after the Commission's chairman, Governor Otto Kerner of Illinois—says in its introductory section:

> Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to white Americans.
>
> What white Americans have never fully understood—but what the Negro can never forget—is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.

The paper on Black Nationalism by C. Eric Lincoln, in Frank Lindenfeld's text, *Radical Perspectives on Social Problems* (Macmillan paperback), takes the reader several steps toward understanding white responsibility for the ghettos, but a certain price is paid in learning from even the best of sociological reports. The "ideal" sociological study strives for objectivity, and even an obviously humane scholar, plainly committed to high social objectives, cannot help but encourage the habit of thinking of the members of a social group as "they." There is something wrong about this—and with, for the same reason, most social science. To get the kind of understanding he needs, the reader must continually try to imagine what his own reactions and behavior would be like under the circumstances endured by the people who are described.

It would be an interesting and instructive project to take the various groups and sub-groups of people dealt with by Mr. Lincoln, and try to duplicate as many as possible of their environmental situations as found in works of fiction. A good novel does not reduce its characters to recognizable "behavior patterns," but shows how human beings choose among various courses of action—the people in a novel *gain* in humanity by being individually understood. This is the felt reality, for example, in K. B. Gilden's *Hurry Sundown,* a story of racial conflict in the deep South.

Some social reports move in this direction. In *Transaction* for last September, Lillian Rubin, a graduate student in sociology at the University of California in Berkeley, writes as a participant-observer of the experience of a jail sentence imposed on a group of women who had demonstrated against the Vietnam war late in 1967. Of the protesters sent to the Alameda County Jail (Santa Rita Rehabilitation Center), one was a Negro. Miss Rubin's article is mainly concerned with the attitudes toward race manifested by the white demonstrators while serving time in a jail where about 85 per cent of the regular inmates are black. As is doubtless true of any jail-population, a number of the inmates were hostile, aggressive, and profane. Miss Rubin reports the curious adaptation of the white demonstrators to behavior which, in one of their own number, they would have rejected almost immediately. Several incidents are described, with the white women eagerly justifying or excusing practically paranoid behavior on the part of one or two black women. The black member of the group of demonstrators could see little sense in this. Miss Rubin relates:

> Maggie, the lone black demonstrator arrested, tried to challenge the racial attitudes and behavior of the group. . . . Her presence was a source of group pride; she enhanced their image of themselves as unprejudiced; and she symbolized the "integrated" nature of the anti-war movement. A great deal of chauvinistic, racist, and downright silly conversation ensued as people maneuvered to establish their credentials as racial liberals. They complained bitterly to her about the conditions in the jail for the regular inmates, especially the black ones. "They're so mean to black people," one girl said. "What makes you say that?" Maggie asked. "Look," another responded, "three out of the four girls in isolation are black." (The comments were particularly ludicrous in view of the fact, already mentioned, that all trusties and guards' helpers—positions with very high visibility—were black.) Maggie replied, "So what! I understand that nine out of ten of all the inmates are

black, so those percentages don't sound bad to me." They recoiled in confusion and whispered among themselves, "Oh, maybe she's one of those middle class Negroes who doesn't care about her *race."*

Later, upon learning that Maggie was living in San Francisco, one of the girls, Sherry, rhapsodized, "I just love to go to the Fillmore district. It's so romantic and beautiful—the streets are filled with beautiful people who know how to *live,* who have *soul*. You're lucky to live there. I go there every chance I get." To which Maggie responded: ". . . I *don't* live there. It's ugly and dirty, and if you're not afraid to walk the streets of the Fillmore at night there's something wrong with you, girl, because *I* am." Sherry, confused, wounded, and uncomprehending, retreated. Later she said to another woman Sarah, "What do you suppose is the matter with Maggie? She seems upset." Sarah replied, "Maybe all she's trying to ask is that we relate to her as a human being rather than as a Negro. Maybe she'd just like us to set the same standards for her and for other Negroes that we set for ourselves. Maybe it's hard for her to believe that people like you can find the behavior of a dope addict, a whore, a pimp, a mugger, or a thief beautiful. It's hard for me to accept that, too." Sherry said: "I don't understand what you mean. We have to accept that behavior—-we've done it to them. We've deprived them of their humanity. Now we have to take whatever they dish out."

So, under the aegis of tolerance, understanding, and acceptance Sherry stripped the Negro of human qualities and prepared to accept him—even to welcome him—as a second-class human being.

This is a difficult sort of analysis and evaluation, yet it does try to get at the essential issue of human dignity, regardless of stereotypes, and no matter how oddly it may be hidden or disguised in the midst of warped social situations. Miss Rubin is perfectly aware of the justification for "compensatory programs," but points out that a gross lowering of standards "is actually a form of racism—an implied acknowledgement of black inferiority."

There are no formulas for embodying basic respect for human beings. Any attitude that is represented by a formula can be falsified in practice. This is doubtless the reason why Black Power has become the only realistic political goal for self-respecting blacks—you can't fake a "nice" relationship to power. Black power is not the only possible response to conscious or unconscious white hypocrisy, but it is a completely understandable one.

Other aspects of this broad problem emerge from an inquiry made by Mrs. Xernona B. Clayton, who is Community Affairs Coordinator for the model city program of Atlanta, Georgia. She asked a number of Atlanta blacks how they would feel about moving into a white neighborhood. Since she is black herself, they answered candidly. Some, she found, would not do it. Many were willing, but didn't want to be the first. None would move just "for the sake of living in an integrated neighborhood." Mrs. Clayton said:

Negroes just want a house—a decent house. They don't care where it is, or whether the neighborhood is integrated.

She tells some of the replies to the question: "Would you mind moving into a white neighborhood?":

A woman: "I wouldn't mind, but whites would isolate me by showing a great difference of affection one way or the other. They would either snub or ignore you, or show an attitude of over-friendliness. In either case, it would make me uncomfortable."

A laborer: "No, I would not want to. The reason is that I have to work every day beside a white man. And it seems like I do twice as much work, and get half as much pay. And at the end of the day, I'd just rather not see him any more."

Young man, a semi-professional: "Yes, I'd gladly go because the stores are better, food is better, housing is better. And I wouldn't have to worry about what kind of community my children could be brought up in, because in the white community it seems like they get the best of everything. And I would want that for my family."

Housewife: "I would feel guilty moving into a white community, because my very presence would chase the white people out. And I would not feel comfortable being responsible for creating that kind of inconvenience for them. It's a known fact that when the first Negro moves in, all the whites run."

> Another housewife: "I would be happy to move into a white neighborhood because where I live now, I can never send my child to the store to get a piece of meat, for fear it would not be quality. But it seems in a white community, quality is the order of the day. And I imagine I would not have to personally choose the cut of meat—they're all good."

The people questioned by Mrs. Clayton represented a cross-section of black society in Atlanta. Her report was published in the *Christian Science Monitor* for last Dec. 6.