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THE SERVICES OF HISTORY

WE owe a great deal to the historians. Through them we obtain definite ideas about where we have come from and are able to enrich our feelings of who we are. The familiar and comfortable sort of identity is, after all, largely a matter of memory. Most of the time, if you ask a man who he is, he tells you about his past. The historians also provide us with critical self-consciousness. Our historians, at any rate, give us the impression that we know a great deal more than our predecessors. The past is viewed from the elevation of present achievements. It seems clear that the modern mind was largely shaped, in its foundations and idea of progress, by the great cultural historians of the nineteenth century—men like W. E. H. Lecky, Henry T. Buckle, John W. Draper, and Andrew D. White. There are others, of course, but these men are pre-eminent. They are urbane, public-spirited, and as impartial as men in their time could be, and they all display an indefinable assurance, a feeling of competence in judgment. A lot of the time, even today, they seem to have been quite right.

Their only fault was they could not see where the world was going. They had no hint that at the end of his life one of the last of their number (H. G. Wells) would write *Mind at the End of its Tether*, putting an appropriately anxious and confused end to the now ingenuous expressions of cultural optimism. This spreading sense of failure, however, did not really emerge (except in prophetic geniuses like Heine and Amiel and Tolstoy) until after World War II. During the first half of the twentieth century another sort of historian took up the task of adding sophistication to our already heightened self-consciousness. The best among this group—perhaps a man qualified to stand for them all—was Carl L. Becker, a thinker too learned and detached to embody any longer the upward-and-onward conceit of "modern civilization." Becker does not speak as a man involved in his times, pressing the age on to better and greater achievement. He writes with the elegance of a man apart, an academic Olympian, gaining his clarity from total objectivity, and a wonderful clarity it is, although, as we now see, not wholly natural. Writing on the eve of the last of the twentieth-century Armageddons, he extracts about all the wisdom there is in the historical relativist position. He shows how every age is captive of its basic conceptions. Although he manifests a restrained Humanism, his brilliance is not marred by "engagement." His is a luxurious sort of "insight," and Becker's readers of today know that they can no longer afford it. Relativist history, you could say, represented the flowering of the proper use of scientific method in the sciences concerned with man. It brought knowledge, but a knowledge that could not be used. Its knower was by definition only an "observer." After Becker, *engagement*, as anyone could see, became a necessity. People like Camus and Sartre began their reshaping of the modern mind, and Becker becomes a somewhat Smithsonian Institution splendor of the past, who wrote history you could not get into. The Staughton Lynds may owe some urbanity to Carl Becker, but little of their vision. Many contemporary historians will no doubt find this proposition a bit ridiculous, but they ought to read Buckle, once again, for perceptions which apply as much to historiography as to the other great changes in attitude which he considers. The beginning of change is always the work of a few pioneers, and as Buckle put it:

> If either a religion or a philosophy is too much in advance of a nation it can do no present service but must bide its time until the minds of men are ripe for its reception. . . . Every science, every creed has had its martyrs. According to the ordinary course of affairs, a few generations pass away, and then there comes a period when these very truths are looked

> upon as commonplace facts, and a little later there comes another period in which they are declared to be necessary, and even the dullest intellect wonders how they could ever have been denied.

The relativists have amply illustrated this process, making Buckle's conclusion inescapable. (Becker's first chapter in *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* is a demonstration so effective that further reading is hardly necessary for this purpose.)

While the Relativists were completing their tasks and perfecting their techniques, a more specialized sort of history was being written—detailed studies of the history of ideas. Among such works, an early and major classic is John Herman Randall, Jr.'s *The Making of the Modern Mind.* Filled with long quotations and excellent summaries, this volume traces the development of modern intellectuality almost to the present. Another valuable work of this character is E. A. Burtt's *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science.* The most recent book in this series, published at a time when such works are becoming something else—volumes intended as launching platforms for change—is Floyd Matson's *The Broken Image* (Braziller, 1964).

We ought now to leave the historians and turn directly to the problem of self-consciousness. Obviously, history contributes a kind of self-consciousness. It enables us to say—either with pride or with shame—I am a Frenchman, an Englishman, or a German; or, I am a new man, an American; or, I am a European, a Renaissance man. When we refine our knowledge of history, we may refine and sharpen our feelings of cultural identity. Black Studies are conceived to have importance for this reason. But there is also self-consciousness with a deeper foundation. What we have been talking about so far could be called the image-makers' kind of self-consciousness, which has built-in limitations and dilemmas. This was the problem first discerned in Western thought by Socrates. Its difficulties explain Plato's opposition to the mimetic poets. Plato could not approve of image-makers as educators.

Here, we need the help of the classical scholar, Eric Havelock, who observes in *Preface to Plato* (Harvard University Press, 1963):

> When confronted with an Achilles, we can say, here is a man of strong character, definite personality, great energy and forceful decision, but it would be equally true to say, here is a man to whom it has not occurred, and to whom it cannot occur, that he has a personality apart from the pattern of his acts. His acts are responses to his situation, and are governed by remembered examples of previous acts by previous strong men. The Greek tongue therefore, as long as it is the speech of men who have remained in the Greek sense "musical" and have surrendered to the spell of tradition, cannot frame words to express the conviction that "I" am one thing and the tradition is another; that "I" can stand apart from the tradition and examine it; that "I" can and should break the spell of its hypnotic force; and that "I" should divert at least some of my mental powers away from memorisation and direct them instead into channels of critical inquiry and analysis.

Did Socrates, as the relativists might have it, only inaugurate a passage from one climate of opinion to another, or is there a "timeless" quality in what he attempted, altering in principle the relations of men with their times—*any* times? When a charismatic man raises this question—the question of an identity beyond history—outside the sanctuary, away from the safety of the academy—and when he goes into the street with such questions, as Socrates did, the only remedy is the hemlock. The managers who depend upon appropriate self-images for their means of social control can find no other solution. So it was death for Socrates, the cross for Jesus, the rack and fagot for others; or, at least, ostracism and neglect, and is likely to remain so, until we figure out how to live self-managed lives and no longer grow desperate at the thought of being left without imagemakers to guide us.

Of course, only a great man and powerful thinker can precipitate an actual historical crisis over the question of identity or the nature of the self. He must not only be able to see clearly, in the way that Socrates saw, but he must also understand how to *teach*—how to set the problem

in comprehensible terms for the men of his time. Socrates seemed able to do this, and with considerable awareness of the percentages—the low percentages—on his side. His determination as a teacher, his spirit of keeping on, no matter what, is embodied in the *Theatetus.* It is difficult to agree with Ernest Becker (see *Beyond Alienation*) that Socrates didn't know what he was up against. At any rate, his *daemon* knew, and told him to stay out of politics, with his unsettling ideas, until the very last when he could make his death count for something—as, indeed, it did. Where would we be, today, in our search for self-knowledge, without the example of Socrates?

What did Socrates say about the self, about human identity? What was *his* answer? Simplification is useless, here, and the reply must be sought in Plato's books, and in others in which a similar guidance is felt, the most important *caveat* being that this is not the sort of knowledge one man can "give" to another. Such truth is not written down, but individually grown, or *forged.* Only the image-makers, the managers and people with an "angle" will pretend to make verbal answers to the important questions.

Holding in mind, then, the crisis in identity precipitated by Socrates, we might return to history—the history of the development of our civilization—and read it as a record of the sequences created by the image-makers. From the purely relativist point of view, the deposit of seminal ideas changes, moving men from one epoch into another, whenever the generalized conception of the self seems inadequate, false, or betraying, and the resulting moral vacuum demands new conceptions. What were the great revolutions of the eighteenth-century but violent responses to this kind of demand? Perhaps we could say that the Declaration of Independence embodies aspects of the Socratic vision of man, a glimpse of its beyond-history universality, but that the image-makers soon confined it to a merely national context, turning what began as authentic aspiration into a style that eventually deserved to be called "arrogant." And this, as the newly "engaged" historians often tell us, is where we are today.

But this sort of self-criticism becomes possible only in the light of renewed Socratic vision. The point of our discussion, then, is to suggest that the forces of contemporary history seem to have exhausted a long succession of roles, and today offer no new identities for patriots to proclaim and future managers to manipulate. If Socrates were among us, he might look around and say to himself, "Hmmmm, the mimetic poets are no longer believable! What's going to happen *now?"*

Not a persistently questioning old stone-mason, but the breakdowns of institutions, the shallowness of public "ideals," and the inadequacy of very nearly all approved conventional means are forcing us into a corner where we must face the issue Socrates originally proposed. No one has put the situation more clearly than Viktor Frankl (in *The Will to Meaning*):

> . . . the existential vacuum seems to me to be a consequence of the following facts. First, in contrast to an animal no drives and instincts tell man what he *must* do. Second, in contrast to former times, no conventions, traditions, and values tell him what he *should* do; and often he does not even know what he basically wishes to do, or he does what other people wish him to do.

If this concise analysis is acceptable, we might say that the diagnosis itself implies a technical sort of solution—comfortless but real. Dr. Frankl is saying that man is the sort of a being or intelligence who has to find out his own meaning, without expecting to obtain unambiguous directions from either the wisdom of the body or the prudence of the past. Man is the being who must *choose* who he is. All the great humanists confirm this view, from Pico della Mirandola to Ortega y Gasset. But it is not comforting. The despondency of Arjuna, the hero of the *Bhagavad-Gita,* had exactly this origin. No one but his enemies would give him unambiguous instructions. Now, it seems, the causes of this

despondency afflict not only the heroes of-mankind, but have overtaken all the world.

It is not that there is *no* help in either instinct or tradition. But there is no mechanistic help which eliminates soul-searching. The individual must now fuse whatever help he finds with personal acts of decision based on. . . . based on *what?* Something outside of time and space, the mystics tell us. One's *daemon*, Socrates implied. But this is still *verboten* language, today. It's "metaphysical," or even "theological." In any event, the ways of speaking of guidance in such a juncture can never be translated into some objective model that can be made the basis of popular "images," so that people who think collectively and insist upon "mass" solutions for human problems remain totally uninterested in the Socratic point of view.

Meanwhile, our pain makes the sagacity of the relativists useless to us. Unengaged scholars who live outside the world have nothing important to say. Yet the technique of impartiality, which they developed and used so well, must be retained and put to work. It is as though, in the circumstances of our psychological crisis, Socrates were inviting us to break the links of the mechanistic chain, to get *out* of history instead of being submerged in it. Scholarship can give us all the warnings we need against submergence—see Roderick Seidenberg's *Post-Historic Man*—but no remedies, no solutions. Without a Socratic vision, even the best of historians can write only Doomsday Books. The construction of better and better images points to nothing else.

But to assume, with Viktor Frankl—and Pico, and Socrates—that we have an identity capable of making decisions independent of, although served by, instinct and tradition, is to declare ourselves as radical *causes*, as originators: indeed, as what we have often called ourselves—"free" men. And that would be to *enter* history the way only the gods are now and then imagined to enter history, and to engage in human affairs.

We can recognize this as the formulation of an old theological problem in a new and healthier form. How does God, people used to ask, enter history? There have been many attempts at answers to this question, and virtually all of them led to almost fatal mistakes—to Holy Inquisitions, to Manifest Destinies, and similar courses of disaster.

The conclusion may be that if something whose reality is outside time and space can ever enter history, it had better not be as some kind of "collectivist" determining power. For this always turns out to be an anti-human power when it gets the popular vote.

In another place in *The Will to Meaning*, Viktor Frankl speaks of the new tasks of education in an age of the existential vacuum. No longer can education simply transmit the learning of "the past," since the past is too bound up with failing traditions. Rather, he says, education must "refine man's capacity to find those unique meanings which are not affected by the crumbling of universal values." He calls this capacity "conscience." And what is conscience? We hardly know. We know only that conscience is real, that it exists. At its best, conscience is the definer of values. It does not define itself. What can we say about it? Is there a grammar of conscience? A logic? Plato thought so, and called it the Dialectic. Probably we can't import the form of Plato's Dialectic into our own time; almost certainly, to evolve a grammar and language for talking about conscience and this kind of education, we need much more than intellectual exercises—something, perhaps, that could be called "existential elevation." In the *Theatetus*, Socrates explains that people lacking sufficient existential elevation couldn't see any sense to what he said, and he sent them to one of the brighter sophists who might be able to teach them a little bit.

We lack disciplined language for this investigation, yet beginnings are being made. The new psychologists are developing words untainted

by theological tradition. Some of the old words, like "transcendence," can still be used. Care must be taken to prevent elegant sophist games from distracting us from search for the imageless reality. It is a good sign that research groups investigating the issues that must be met by future education are already formulating some of these matters in very general terms. For example, in a recent paper, "The Affective Domain and Beyond," published by the Educational Policy Research Center at Stanford, a psychologist, Robert E. Kantor, remarks:

> Research in psychology and psychiatry has emphasized the extent to which mental health is defined as a man's view of himself. Erikson has helped us to understand how crucial and how perilous is the young person's search for identity. Josh Billings said: "It is not only the most difficult thing to know oneself, but the most inconvenient one, too." Human beings have always had an enormous variety of clever devices for running away from themselves, and modern society is particularly rich in such stratagems. A rational society requires a narrow, specialized focus. Its citizens can acquire this focus most effectively by stuffing their heads with so much knowledge that they never have time to probe the fearful and wonderful world within.

The narrow focus of what we mean by "rationalism" makes a serious problem, since it leads people moved mainly by euphoric feelings to suppose that they have no need to be rational. But Plato was a rationalist—and a more symmetrical one than the architects of the nineteenth-century world-view. The monopoly of "the rational" so long held by the mechanists and the technicians will have to be broken by a new generation of metaphysicists to save us from a revolution of mindless impulse.

An interesting and encouraging feature of Dr. Kantor's paper is his discussion of "goals." Where self-knowledge is the substratum of accomplishment, the goals, he suggests, can't be finite. You don't plant the flag anywhere and then tell other people, "This is it." He writes:

> For affective learnings, the goal is not mastery. There is no reachable end-point on the way to which highly specific steps or objectives can be spelled out. Continuous growth is the goal. . . . The question of equality of capacity is not central, since mastery is not the goal. What is of concern is "an ability, a power, . . . the possibility of growth."

Growth is something to which there can be no conceivable end, even if the model-makers find it convenient to define ends that are resting-places. That is why the modelmakers can be of no help to us. But if we all have to find our own way, and must go our own pace, how can we help one another? Well, we can surely do what others have done: *Find* our own way, *go* our own pace, and thus supply evidence that the thing is worth doing. Summing up in this paper, Dr. Kantor says that the object implicitly sought by man in this enterprise "is characterized by the experience of openness to the reality of every moment." Further, it is "an experience of self-acceptance, where 'self' does not stand for a preconceived notion or image but for the experiential self-reality, moment after moment." Again, "The subjective self is not a religious tenet but a psychological fact." That, some will say, isn't enough. A sensible reply would be, Of course not. But adding to the idea of the self is going to take time. People in a hurry will make costly mistakes. History has valuable instruction in this.

REVIEW
SPOKESMAN FOR DISSENTING YOUTH

USING for his title, *The Whole World Is Watching*—the words chanted by protesting students at the last Democratic National Convention in Chicago—a Harvard Sophomore, Mark Gerzon, has written an insider's book on the attitudes of dissenting youth (Viking Press, 1969, $6.95). It is more a psychological analysis of his generation's views than an attempt at explanation of particular acts and demonstrations. While there is a long section, "Youth and Politics," discussion is focused on the unreality of conventional politics, as seen by the young, rather than on the claims and objectives of Students for a Democratic Society. Mr. Gerzon does pretty well at understanding both his own generation and the generation represented by his parents. His book seems a deliberate attempt to help older people to grasp the meaning of the widening abyss between the two generations. His chief point seems to be that the young cannot feel what their parents feel because their experience has been so different. They are not threatened by the things that threatened the previous generation. They see as vicious and growing evils situations and tendencies toward which their parents were and are indifferent, uninformed, or morally neutral. Each chapter is headed with a quotation from the new minstrelsy of youth—Simon and Garfunkel, Bob Dylan, Donovan, the Beatles, Country Joe and the Fish, and others—as containing in lyrical brevity the judgments and dreams that may be slowly changing the polarity of human objectives in the United States. These themes are spelled out and explained by Mark Gerzon in some 265 pages of text.

For effective generalization on what youth are rejecting, the author draws on Erich Fromm and David Riesman and John Kenneth Galbraith. Such writers provide strong foundation and are natural for a social science major to quote, but one could wish Mark Gerzon were more familiar with the other humanistic psychologists of the present, who could throw further light on the problems he discusses. Of classical social science sources, Max Weber seems the most useful in illuminating prophetically the anxiety-saturated acquisitiveness of the existing society, which the young find totally unappealing. As Gerzon says:

> From an economic perspective, too, the young conclude that modern, affluent man is no longer working primarily for himself. The intellectual or religious justification for such an attitude toward work and life stems from what Max Weber called the Protestant ethic. In tracing the growth of capitalism, he concluded that identical with capitalism is not only the pursuit of profit, but the pursuit of *ever-renewed* profit. Weber said that the Protestant ethic actually tried to create a type of personality—a personality that values above all "restless, continuous, systematic work in a worldly calling'" so that "man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life."
>
> A phrase that is peculiarly American is: "What is he worth?" It means: "What is his income or what is the value of his total estate?" The question is asked usually about men of great wealth. It would be embarrassing indeed to ask the same question about a poor man. One would then have to answer, "He's not worth a red cent," a reply which is, among other things, very un-Christian, for the same would have to be said about Christ.
>
> This is only language, of course, but it is the set of values which supports such language that this generation of alienated college youth finds unacceptable. Young people know too many adults (as is evidenced by their criticisms of business) who are "worth" thousands or millions but who are worth a great deal less as concerned parents or compassionate human beings.

There is a sense in which, again and again, the young give evidence of taking seriously values to which older people have given only lip service for generations. The unconscious hypocrisy behind a great deal of the "American Way" is certainly a major psychological barrier between the generations. But Mr. Gerzon's book cannot be said to be made up of "reproaches" of this sort. He investigates the generation gap in terms of radical differences of environment. The young do not remember the fervors of World War II, nor

the angry suspicions of the Joe McCarthy epoch. And as children of affluent parents, the fear of want hardly touches their lives. What were once absorbing motives for their parents have lapsed into mere conventions for the young. They see through these conventions to the failures of the times, and the "phoniness" made a by-word by Salinger.

The Silent Generation of the fifties, Gerzon says, took their alienation quietly, often pretending to conform. (Warren Miller's book, *The Way We Live Now*, is a good illustration of this.) Today's generation is actively and openly searching for "character ideals that fit its conception of what manhood should be." On the question so often asked, "How numerous are these 'rebels'?", there is the following:

> Now there are too many taking part in this psychological rebellion for the alienated to remain either silent or fearful. Their influence has become disproportionately great because they are often the actively intelligent members of youth culture. These social "anomalies"—the critics, the demonstrators, the hippies, the new breed of student leaders (recognizable in places as disparate as Iowa and Stanford)—are by no means unintelligent misfits. They are the young people who once would have striven with enthusiasm, and success, to be this nation's leaders. Despite the fact that this group comprises only a minority of the generation, it is a social force much greater than its numbers indicate.
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> When we realize the size and the dynamic effect of the alienated group, the increase in its numbers can be better understood. While in the 1950's this minority was but 3 to 5 per cent, it became by the mid-1960's a solid 15 per cent of the college generation. As we approach 1970, their numbers have swelled to 25 per cent. If society does not respond to the criticisms of the young, it can be estimated that by 1975 many more of the college generation will be sharing many of the alienated attitudes that today are mistakenly attributed to only a small and insignificant dropout fringe.
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> If society can grasp the meaning of a group of alienated and articulate young men of this size, it can begin to understand the magnitude the search for a global identity will attain in the future. Our nation will contain a vast reservoir of capable young men who, although they became citizens of the United States automatically at birth, will have virtually no attraction or allegiance to the character ideals of their society.

Gerzon draws on personal experience of the Pentagon demonstration in 1967 to show how alienation and distrust spreads among the young. Many of the youth who went to Washington expected that the truth would be told about what they did and why they did it. But these students "were amazed that the number and nature of the demonstrators could be so completely distorted by press reporters." The Pentagon figure on the number of demonstrators was used by the newspapers in preference to the higher estimate of the Washington Police Department. In consequence, "thousands of concerned people who came to the march did not exist in the minds of newspaper readers and television viewers across the country." The uncounted people, he later learned, "had been magically transported by the mass media to *pro-war* marches in New York and Boston, for which the count of marchers was given as double the true number, rather than half." Then there was the matter of who demonstrated before the Pentagon:

> As soon as I saw the morning papers, I realized that not only did half the people that marched not exist, but the half that existed were no longer themselves. Mothers, veterans high-schoolers, college students from across the country—they all found out by reading the papers and watching the newsreels that they were bearded hippie kooks or Commies waving red flags. They also found out that they marched not because it was the only way they could register their genuine opposition to our foreign policy, but because they were inspired by Communist agitators. By changing the numbers and changing the people, mass-media coverage helped most Americans dismiss the event with a yawn or perhaps a snarl of anger at those stupid kids littering the Lincoln Memorial.
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> When I got back to the campus I heard student after student express this thought: *If a real event right here in the nation's capitol can be so effectively distorted by the press, what must the news media be able to do with events that happen halfway around the world in the jungles of Vietnam?*

In this book Mark Gerzon attempts a full spectrum of psycho-social analysis, and much of it seems thorough and informing. He deals effectively with the psychology of advertising, which feeds on the anxiety and insecurity of people who fear they will fail to "make it." The mass media are expert manipulators of frustration:

> In adult society we see everyone trying to keep up with the Joneses; but the sad thing is that the Joneses themselves are trying to keep up with the Smiths, and the Smiths with the Johnsons (et cetera). Like lemmings, many adults seem to be following the image of the socially desirable personality. The tragedy which this generation is becoming aware of is that *the image is based less and less on the real desires of men themselves, and more and more on a personality stereotype created by the media.* Young people realize that this stereotype is not made to develop individual happiness or fulfillment, but structured to reinforce the patterns of behavior which support industrial, technological values. Those who try to capture for themselves the evasively social personality are destined to psychological failure, even if they achieve social success.

The author offers an extremely interesting review of a recent book by an American exchange student, William Taubman, whose *View from the Lenin Hills,* based on intimate contact with Soviet students in Moscow, makes it plain that Soviet leaders are as misunderstanding of Russia's coming generation as American leaders are of theirs. Gerzon's discussion of marijuana and LSD seems sensible and informing on the use of drugs by present-day students; his appreciation of the early days of the Peace Corps, before it was "promoted" as evidence of America's "high ideals," gives further insight into the attitudes of youth. In general, this book should accomplish much along the lines that the writer hopes for.

COMMENTARY
CONTRADICTION IN TERMS?

MARK GERZON'S book, *The Whole World Is Watching* (see Review), embodies the central dilemma of the age. The dissenting "generation," he says, "reflects the need for a change in approach, a move toward nonviolence and away from aggression." Of the radicals of the 1960's he says:

> Their means are basically nonviolent, whether legal or illegal. And their goal is to gain power. And with power in the hands of the nonviolent, they conclude, we will be safe in a nuclear age.

That the author may share this view is later suggested by his criticism of the "psychological dropout," who is typed as contending:

> "The problem is not primarily in the political system . . . but in the minds of men. Your mind has the same hassles the government and military have. You work with the same priorities they work with. You think in terms of power; you look at different factions with hate; you want to control and organize others. The way you have had to live has made your mind work like theirs, whatever your political differences. First, solve the problems of your own mind; then solve the problems of the world." (The Beatles state the psychologically alienated position succinctly when they sing. "If you want money for minds that hate, well, you'll just have to wait.")
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> The psychological insight of the latter young man is wasted for he does not engage in a way of life that will in any way improve the aspects of society which he criticizes. His awareness is never translated into social action because his alienation is so overpowering that he feels any political action is doomed to failure.

Yet the author seems to feel that non-political behavior can have *no* effect! The issues are vastly oversimplified here, yet the basic problem of revolutionary change is implicit. To what extent can power make up for the lack of harmony and order created by individual development and voluntaristic infra-structure? The tyranny of righteous men begins, as we all ought to know by now, with the substitution of coercive power for inadequate public response to social responsibility.

But *nonviolent* revolutionary means and authority, it is argued, will prevent such abuse. How? How do we know that "power in the hands of the nonviolent" is not a contradiction in terms? The claims made, today, in behalf of what can be done by nonviolence are urged in what seems cavalier neglect of the counsels of Gandhi, who was, after all, practically the inventor of nonviolence in modern times. Do not, he urged his co-workers and successors, seek power; for if you do, he explained, you will find yourselves as limited in what you can do as those are who now have it.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE NEW WAVE

THERE are interesting parallels between present-day thinking about education and the ideas of leading Americans, a little less than two hundred years ago, on this subject, but there are also marked differences. This observation is prompted by a reading, over a period of a couple of months, of the *New Schools Exchange Newsletter,* which comes out two or three times a month and may be subscribed to by sending a dollar a month to New Schools Exchange, 2840 Hidden Valley Lane, Santa Barbara, Calif. 93103.

The similarity in thinking lies in the grass-roots, nonprofessional, individual concern and interest in teaching the young that animates the people who are starting new schools, many of them in California. The difference lies in the conception of what education is expected to accomplish. The Founding Fathers, for example, thought of education mainly as the means of achieving strong, vigorous nationhood for a new country, while the people responsible for these new schools of today have in mind a very different hierarchy of goals. Yet exciting about those early days of American life is the fact that the population had not differentiated into coteries of "culture" and professional specialists. Ben Franklin remarked: "To America one schoolmaster is worth a dozen poets, and the invention of a machine or the improvement of an implement is of more importance than a masterpiece of Raphael." George Washington, who loved the theatre, wanted it to serve as "a chief refiner" of the people, while Jefferson seemed quite content to remark, in 1813, "We have no distinct class of *literati* in this country." John Adams felt that the fine arts sprang from luxury, were prostituted by despotism, and were of no use to a young nation. "The age of painting," he said, "has not yet arrived in this country, and I hope it will not arrive very soon."

Two books convey well the background and atmosphere of thought in those days—*The Roots of American Culture,* by Constance Rourke (Harcourt, Brace, 1942), and Allen Hansen's *Liberalism and American Education in the Eighteenth Century* (Macmillan, 1926). Then, for contrast and general shake-up, one might also read Simone Weil's *The Need for Roots,* written during World War II as an answer to the question of what France should do to re-establish culture after liberation from the Nazi occupation.

As for the preoccupation of the early Americans with "nationhood," it ought to be noted that a great many of the functions of present-day social organization are simply taken for granted even by severe critics of our society, and that, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the idea of a new nation covered the values of what is now spoken of as "community." The Founding Fathers, not so very unlike social idealists of today, conceived the society they hoped to evolve in utopian terms, and contrasted their dreams with European institutions. Noah Webster wrote:

> . . . this country must, at some future time, be as distinguished by the superiority of her literary improvements as she is already by the liberality of her civil and ecclesiastical institutions. Europe is grown old in folly, corruption and tyranny—in that country laws are perverted, manners are licentious, literature is declining, and human nature is debased. For America in her infancy to adopt the present maxims of the old world would be to stamp the wrinkle of decrepit age upon the bloom of youth, and to plant the seed of decay in a vigorous constitution.

Perhaps quotation from the Founding Fathers will not seem very "grass roots" to some people, but the reader of Constance Rourke soon realizes that the people of that time were far less institutionalized than Americans are today, and that parents would hardly think of delegating responsibility for education and other cultural activities. It is this spirit which seems reborn in the present, despite great differences in the social setting. The following quotations are from reports of new schools started, all but one in

California, in the *New Schools Newsletter* for July 8:

> In Oakland: The New Community School . . . "is an independent parent-and-community-run project, organized on an interracial, multi-ethnic basis. It is a unique and serious departure from the traditional Junior-Senior High School education and will serve as an alternative model illustrating the immense possibilities of contemporary education . . . opening in September. . . ."
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> Mill Valley: The first meeting on this new school will be Sept. 2 . . . "we gave up a big office building and the school is coming on like Parkway School in Philadelphia. We meet in different places indoors and out but the school will meet once a week in one place."
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> San Francisco: Hearthshire School, beginning its second year, needs full-time teacher-people. "We have envisioned and apparently created a kind of liberated children's world. We are city-based, having 20-30 children, ages 5-10, and growing. . . ."
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> Richmond: "We believe that there is an urgent need in the Richmond area for a private demonstration at the secondary level—a school that would function as a center for eliminating the problems of racial conflict, student apathy, and student unrest. We wish to create an environment in which students, teachers, and parents can communicate freely, and in which true friendship and understanding can develop."
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> Davenport, Washington: "We have recently started a new cooperative free school here. There is a sort of anarchistic community here called Tolstoy Farm, six years old, 200 acres and about 40 residents. We plan to have the whole place be an educational environment with learning being incidental to daily life. We do, however, have to build a schoolhouse and have a licensed teacher to satisfy the authorities and we do plan to take on some boarding students in our private homes. We have already six families set up with homes and gardens."

The *Newsletter* for July 17 has the following from a new school started in Pocatello, Idaho:

> "The basic premise of this school shall be that students are worthy individuals possessing spontaneity, creativity, curiosity and insight. Our main goal will be to encourage and develop these qualities as instruments for the lifelong pursuit of knowledge and understanding. . . there will be no grading or division into grades; and no rigidly required assignments."
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> "The school will include children from age five through elementary grades. The general plan will be cooperative with at least one full-time non-parent teacher."

Besides telling about new schools which are opening up, and describing those already established, the *Newsletter* lists persons wishing to teach in such schools, and gives their qualifications and special interests.

FRONTIERS

Science In Transition

WHEN intellectual leaders begin to ask themselves, in public, how they ought to test what they really know, and wonder about what they rely upon for final decisions concerning truth, meaning, and identity, far-reaching changes are almost certainly in store for the world of human thought and action. The stable periods of history are times when first principles are either ignored or taken for granted, or at any rate left unquestioned. As a matter of fact, simply to identify what men unquestioningly believe is a way of questioning their beliefs. To consider what you believe and to examine what it leads to is automatically a consideration of alternative beliefs. By this means, dominant ideologies are made to fall into ruins.

This spirit seems very much in evidence today among pioneering scientific thinkers. No real scientist can be comfortable when he discovers that some of the assumptions on which he has been operating have not been critically examined. He is bound by his integrity, by the meaning of scientific inquiry, to put all such assumptions back into the flux of unproved contentions and to examine their alternatives. If, as a social institution, the practice of science affected by these assumptions has become rigid, in typical ideological style, the investigator usually encounters resistance, prejudice, anger, and sometimes even persecution. (See David Lindsay Watson, *Scientists Are Human*, Watts, London, 1938.) He is now, perhaps unwillingly, a reformer.

Much has appeared in MANAS lately concerning the reexamination of the assumptions of scientific method, especially as illustrated by the work of Michael Polanyi. A less dramatic but in some ways equally revealing instance of this trend is found in the *Saturday Review* for Aug. 2, in the article, "What Would a Scientific Religion Be Like?", by H. G. McPherson, the physicist who has been deputy director of Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Oak Ridge, Tennessee, since 1964. At the outset Dr. McPherson explains his intention to look at religion as a scientist, to see what scope for religious ideas is permitted by his conception of scientific method. At once ruled out are beliefs in supernatural events, such as the Virgin Birth and miracles contravening natural law. Fanciful theological conceptions of geography, for instance the physical existence of Hell, or an actual celestial region for Heaven, are also barred. Literal interpretation of creation myths becomes impossible, also belief in "a god possessing supernatural powers."

It is evident that giving up these aspects of religion is no hardship for Dr. McPherson. His interest is rather in the direction of *consciousness*, which might be regarded as a prior reality for both science and religion. Crucial in human life is man's awareness of his own existence (although, curiously, Dr. McPherson does not distinguish between animal consciousness and the radically different self-awareness of human beings). The scientist's approach to religion, he suggests, will naturally result in study of the nature, character, and basis of consciousness. He writes:

> It takes only a small amount of reflection to realize that the phenomenon of conscious existence, which we believe to be beyond the scope of the scientist, is of more importance to us than any of the things that are within the scientist's domain. Science can deal only with the setting within which this conscious awareness exists. The setting largely determines the opportunity for a higher quality of existence. For example the physical world in which the scientist operates determines the food we eat and how we get it, the clothing we wear, our housing, transportation, heat and refrigeration, sanitation, and medicine. Without our conscious awareness, however, all of these benefits of science and technology would be of no significance.

The basic question, here, although Dr. McPherson does not use these words, seems to be: How much of our consciousness is simply a result of the states of matter and organic arrangements in which it emerges?

An older, metaphysical formulation would be: Is consciousness "secreted" by its forms, or by the matter of its forms, or is it merely expressed and limited by them?

A homely analogy would be the comparison between an accomplished pianist and his instrument. Attack the piano with an axe, or leave it out in the weather for a few months, and the proof of the pianist's musicianship would be quite impossible. His skill would be *latent;* it would be real, but we could not recognize or demonstrate it without supplying him with a new piano.

Could human consciousness, admittedly of unknown potentiality, have a similar relation to the organism through which it manifests? Dr. McPherson discusses some phases of this problem:

> The quality of consciousness appears to vary a great deal among different people, and also changes during the life of each individual. Factors affecting the quality of consciousness include such things as inherent intellectual capability and the pattern of attitude and habits that the person has assumed through past associations. What is referred to here as the human spirit encompasses the entire range of the quality and intensity of the individual. External manifestations of this spirit are the personality of the individual, his actions (as evidences of the mental choices he has made), and his communication with others, whether by verbal or other means.

What comes next gives promise of a revolutionary expansion of the idea of science, and of a new conception of scientific method and discipline, however tentative at the beginning:

> Although a full understanding of the mechanism of consciousness lies outside the domain of the scientist, it is appropriate to examine the available evidence in order to try to discover some broad truths about consciousness and the human spirit. Since the richest source of evidence about the human spirit is subjective—obtained by examining our own thoughts and by making personal interpretations of other people's behavior—the scientist will squirm for he has been trained to be objective. He will cringe at the lack of experimental controls. However, he would agree that it is better to look where the information is abundant rather than rule out all but the most sterile information as would be done if we limited ourselves to scientifically verifiable sources.

Such willingness to explore the regions of subjective experience is proof that Dr. McPherson is no ideologist. That this adventurous spirit, while gaining strength, is still exceptional among scientific inquirers makes the central problem to be solved some day by the historians of culture and the evolution of ideas. It could be set as a question: How does an enthralling vision become a restricting convention? How can you tell where and when the change takes place?

Obviously, to wait until we can make *social* judgments about such matters is to wait far too long. Insisting on massive statistical evidence requires us to pay the price of breaking down ideological formations, challenging vested interests and exposing identity fears. Waiting too long will confront us with all the defenses which imitative thinking puts up when threatened at its foundations. The psychology of refusing to question routine assumptions and of adopting only "safe" theories needs attention in individual psychology, so that we can at least *begin* to prevent the agonies which are inevitable when whole populations suffer contradictions that can no longer be ignored.

We might notice that it is difficult to distinguish Dr. McPherson's reflections from the issues of the new "self-psychology." He finds in these ideas the essence of religion. Not fables of creation, not doctrines about "God," but what a man can learn about man, in and of himself. The latter part of his article is devoted to this sort of inquiry. This kind of religion, we may think, would be much less subject to the vicissitudes of ideology. It depends upon personal reality-testing. And the moral guidance it affords rests upon an ethical ground:

> All religions contain within their structure a set of rules for behavior: definitions of the good and the bad. Many people, on losing faith in their religion, also lose faith in the arbitrary rules and seek new guides arrived at by logical method. As a scientist, I find an acceptable logic in the values that arise from

> interactions with fellow human beings. Broadly speaking, I look at the effect of my actions and attitudes on the spirits of those about me. Where this influence helps those about me to meet the problems of life in healthy and constructive ways then I regard my actions as good. Conversely, if I do things that turn out to be harmful to the spirit of others, then I have done wrong.
>
> The application of this principle is fairly straightforward. For example, the willful destruction of another spirit is obviously bad for that spirit and the rule "Thou shalt not kill" is quickly verified. Other instances of bad behavior are just as easily verified. From them it is possible to evolve a guide to what I *should* be doing, namely, those things that help to bring about the full development of other human spirits.

There may be a clue, here, to the principle of survival in an age of crumbling ideologies and multiplying causes of identity crisis. Simple attention to the good of others as the rule of life is a conception of role and identity that can hardly break down.