

"UNLESS WE GET UNDERSTANDING"

IN 1964 the University of Chicago Press brought out a book by Milton Mayer called *What Can a Man Do?* It is an excellent book, deserving re-reading from time to time, but here we are interested only in its title, which is short for the longer query, "What can a man do in order to be human?" This question has become urgent in recent years. All the ordinary models, especially the inherited ones, of what a man ought to do, can be seen to have grave limitations. There are so many things which, while common practice, we ought not to be doing at all, and the finding of alternatives has become difficult and arduous. It seems that no matter what you decide to do, other urgencies get neglected as a result. The situation calls for numerous Leonardo da Vincis in reform and change, and we,—or most of us—are but uncertain beginners at such tasks.

A letter from a reader in Ohio helps to focus the problem:

The excellent quotations from Aldo Leopold (Jan. 27 issue, page 6) make a magnificent illustration of one of the concepts long pushed by organic farmers. It was about the soil on the south side of the Spessart Mountain, as contrasted with the northern side. It took me a long time to realize that the dirt under one's feet is a world of living things and that their part and purpose on this earth is every bit as important as mine. As the husbandman in agriculture gave way to chemist, merchant, advertiser, and the corporation, and as man lived more and more apart from nature, arrogance joined up with ignorance to work such destruction of soil and food as to bring on the crisis of health that exists today.

As chemicals have made life in the soil precarious, then nonexistent, the soil lost its humus, making true fertility impossible. Without honest fertility in the soil, health for plants, animals, and man is impossible. Nature's laws are as clear and as firm here as they are for building great buildings or bridges or taking trips to the moon. The "scientist" has all but brainwashed people into believing that

they can eat or do anything, since he can produce a drug or a medicine to take care of the consequences. The doctor spends years in a medical school, not to be able to recognize and maintain health, but to be able to put some 4,000 different names on diseases and match some drug with each. Nature's refusal to bow to this arrogance is attested by the fact that disease is growing faster than population. Three out of four of us are chronically ill, the fourth isn't likely to be too well. Vibrant health comes from practices in harmony with natural law. Most of us seem to have forgotten, or maybe never even realized that there is such a thing as natural law. Degenerative diseases have increased in parallel with the growing use of chemicals in agriculture. Cancer is now the number one killer of children, one to fourteen. It would take 100 Vietnam wars to equal the daily deaths from cancer, 250 such wars to equal the daily deaths from heart troubles!

It is fine that at long last the problems of pollution have been brought into the focus of public attention. The doomsayers are now having their day and it is frightening to think that they may be right in their dire predictions. Yet too little attention is paid to what may be crudely called "body pollution." While the FDA, doctors, and others soothe the public each time a new poison shows up in food, saying in effect that there is so little mercury in the tuna that one couldn't get hurt by it, the fact of real importance is that nearly everything we eat, the air we breathe and the water we drink, plus the contributions of habits such as tobacco and alcohol, give an over all ingestion of poison that is said to average three pounds per person per year! In nature, poison was never intended as cell nutrition. This nutrition is the name of the game if one would talk health. Yet professionals with all kinds of degrees keep up the hogwash about health being little, if at all, affected by the ubiquitous poisons of our way of life.

Man finds comfort, and lots of jobs, in the process of blaming every wrong on something else or someone else. It just couldn't be his own violations of natural law that cause illness! And so the search for a germ or a virus on which to blame cancer, or whatever, goes on. The integrity of cancer research can be questioned when one knows that the AMAFDA alliance positively prohibits any research

involving natural cures. This covers up a lot that should be answered and at the same time, preserves an enormously profitable field of "service."

This just barely touches on the important problems of health from the soil up to man. They deserve much more. Your articles touch constantly on the health of society. I am persuaded that you must begin with the soil to answer many of the questions about society's health and man's. Soil, Food, and Health indicate relationships that never should be separated. They should be explored much more by anyone trying to find answers in these bewildering times. . . .

Since retirement, circumstances have driven me to an ever more intensive study of Soil, Food, and Health. I am appalled by the size of the problem as I search for information and understanding. Unless we get greater understanding, we are doomed in time, regardless of other pollution problems. To get people to understand this is one of the hardest things I've ever tackled.

The appeal of these contentions is beyond dispute, and there is no question but that those who are able to devote themselves to work along these lines will perform services of immeasurable importance to the entire population. Apart from the usefulness of such a career, there is the personal satisfaction to be obtained from work which is both restorative and fruitful. Finally, what our correspondent says is no longer a "cry in the wilderness," but the expression of a strong and growing movement which has many supporters, a large literature, and even increasing scientific support. It should not be forgotten that Sir Albert Howard, who is justly named the founder of the organic gardening movement, was a practicing scientist, and that Rachel Carson was also trained as a scientist and had the respect and support of eminent men in her field.

Yet a question needs to be asked. Why should there be *any* opposition to the general contentions of those who share these views and concerns? Why should such an abyss separate what we may call "bureaucratic science"—in this case, the "AMA-FDA alliance"—and the actual growing edge or front of scientific understanding?

Questions of this sort always turn on the sources of moral and intellectual certainty. The basic trouble, it seems, lies in the all-too-human expectation that certainty can be had without risk and without daring. This was the view that led to the hardening of both religious and scientific orthodoxy into cut and dried formulas. Yet the *founders* of religions were never of this persuasion. They took great risks and sometimes lost their lives for what they believed. Orthodoxy in opinion, then, is based on the assumption that a follower need not—indeed cannot—be the sort of man the founder was. A follower is called upon to believe, to accept, but never to dare, to question, to dissent. The follower, in short, belongs to a lesser breed, and he often makes capital of his dependency and objects to independence in others.

Religious orthodoxy is still a problem, but not the ominous threat that it was in the days of Giordano Bruno or of Galileo, when heresy meant ostracism or death. Present-day religious freedom owes much to the rise of science. The scientific movement was not a "pure" search for truth, but as much as anything the fight of independent minds for sheer survival. Unfortunately, it did not stop with "freedom," but went on to establish its own sort of sovereignty. Almost any book on the intellectual development of the West will show that what began as a defense against the claims of supernatural authority ended as a systematic expurgation of any remnant of transcendental ideas from the philosophy of science. Even "natural law" had to go, finally, because conceptually it lacked the exactitude demanded by mechanistic analysis and was rather a pantheistic intuition than a working rule the effects of which could be isolated through observation and verified by experiment. The time arrived when any generalization which even hinted at *meaning* in a natural phenomenon was sure to be jeered at in conventional scientific circles. The separation of scientific knowledge from life and purpose and high human longing was by the early years of the twentieth century an indisputable assumption of

methodology in research. There is endless evidence of this. Biologists had no interest in something mysterious called "life," psychologists ridiculed the idea of "consciousness," and experimenters denied that there could be any "moral implications" in the work they undertook. Science, for the great majority, had come to mean study of a sterile world of mechanistic certainties, and what lay outside of the competence of its techniques was branded as unreal or nonexistent.

Great scientists knew better than this, but they were busy with their own complex explorations, and elaborate structures of scientific orthodoxy grew up all around them, without much difficulty. It is only since World War II that distinguished men of science have begun to try to make themselves heard as humanists, and to institute reforms in scientific thinking, but the displacement of any orthodoxy, whether of religion or science, is always a long and painful task. Men like, say, Linus Pauling are labelled "troublemakers" and regarded as unmanageable by administrators, while education, especially the massively institutionalized and bureaucratized educational systems of the United States, remains the bastion of orthodoxy instead of the source of innovation and deliberated change.

It must be added that merchants and manufacturers of articles for the retail market find it vastly profitable to cultivate the "follower" psychology. There is an obvious relation between the promotion and sale of mass-produced commodities and strengthening the habit of imitation. Uniformity of wants and of patterns of "consumption" is the psychological engine of progress for corporate enterprise, and respect for authority is a built-in necessity of the entire industrial process. Any kind of innovation which would disturb this process becomes, to the defenders of the faith, practically an immoral tendency.

So there are multiple cultural influences which shape the psychology of the mass society, making people reluctant to dissent from any of the

established assumptions of the time. Bureaucratic science is also reinforced by the righteousness of administrators who believe themselves to be charged with the responsibility of protecting the public from "unscientific" claims and "quack" remedies and products. Complex mixtures of motive enter into all such functions. Finally, the general public has been exposed for more than a century to immeasurable enthusiasm for science, blending into propaganda in both advertising and politics, which has created exactly those expectations of which our correspondent speaks. The source of this propaganda is not really the "scientist," but a synthetic mythical image personifying all science, on which people have come to rely to solve all problems.

Great changes have taken place in the common life since the original homesteaders settled this country. Their natural independence and organic relationships with the earth and its resources are almost gone. Until nearly the end of the nineteenth century, if a man got tired of being a "follower," he could go West and still be his own man. But little by little the avenues open to this old sort of self-reliance have been closed off or used up. America is no longer a "land of opportunity," and the deepening sense of loss produces the angry politics of nostalgia along with various forms of revolt among the young. Meanwhile, among many older people, the idea of questioning scientific authority is almost as unwelcome as religious heresy was to much earlier generations.

What then can happen now, when doubt and insecurity spread like weeds after a tropical rain, and the old means of seeking independence—by migration and coping with nature—are no longer available?

This question is simply without answer. One thing, however, can be said: There is a great need for people in all walks of life to obtain a better understanding of what happened, and will continue to happen, so that they can begin to make adjustments in their own lives. This is really

the only remaining alternative to the *maladjustments* of catastrophe, breakdown, loss of faith, and the bitter partisanships which arise when fear becomes the dominating emotion in people's lives.

If we look at the major institutions of the present, listening carefully to all the expressions of the men involved in them, we have no difficulty in recognizing that they, too, are asking themselves questions. Paul Goodman has seen this and written a book about it—*The New Reformation*. The institutions, while they *look* monolithic, are by no means as rigid as they used to be, in terms of the attitudes of human beings. Every day there are some who break out and dare to "go it alone," living on less and learning to need less. Such persons could form free associations of trained persons who add the discipline of their backgrounds to a freer atmosphere. Some have already done this. And that is really what is needed, along with the daring and the will to independent thinking and action. Work for change and reform outside of institutional settings requires discipline and knowledge even more than conventional undertakings, since the prestige of organizations will be lacking, so far as public attitudes are concerned. This is the only way for free men to contest successfully the authority of orthodoxy—by showing that they have the superior authority of knowledge.

It has to be realized that, inevitably, when the cultural institutions of a society become narrow and inhospitable to discovery, change, and reform, they sooner or later drive the best human beings into the streets, where they must work without conventional recognition. This is what happened to Socrates, and it happens to every man who finds it necessary to resist an orthodoxy grown too confining for intelligent men to rely on its facilities and accept its protection. How do these men prove their quality? By having all the virtues claimed by the orthodoxy, and other strengths and qualities which are far more important.

The conversion of an entire population to a self-reliant and independent way of life is not a task for a single generation, but something that is accomplished slowly, through delicate growth processes aided by intelligent communication, by the power of example, and by the fruit in both human and practical values which results. Discipline and knowledge were never more needed than now, in this age of "advanced" knowledge and technical information. One thinks, for example, of the case of the benevolent soul who, having a little money, decided to buy some land in northern California to be settled by thronging youngsters who want to live "naturally." In Humboldt County he found forty acres for sale at what seemed a good price, and made a down payment. Then, having a practical streak in him, he persuaded a forester to cruise the land with him so they could talk about its possibilities. He learned that the soil was too poor to grow trees—in a hundred years, perhaps, the forester told him, he might coax a tree to maturity. It wasn't any good for grazing land, either, for reasons that were given. The general area was dotted with camps of ardent youths, but they got regular checks from Public Assistance. Meanwhile, the countryside was beginning to look like a wilderness slum, with stream pollution about the worst in that part of the state.

Well, the Pied Pipers have had their day, and the hated "system" is picking up the tab for these migrants to infertile Shangri-Las. No one told these youngsters about the relation between soil, food, and health: they heard it was groovy out in the "country" and they just went. Not all the places where they go are like that, of course. Reports on the communes are various, some of them exciting and encouraging. Yet mistakes like this one wouldn't ever have been made if earlier generations had taken care to prevent authority from falling into the hands of bureaucracy, and had not entrusted so many basic decisions to experts of various sorts.

Life, it will be said, will have to be enormously simplified if we are to do without experts. For people who have become so dependent on an artificial environment, the difficulty with simplification lies in knowing where or how to begin. Yet the beginnings have already been made by people who hardly knew what they were doing—they just did it, like the man who bought land in Humboldt County. Meanwhile, an engrossing study such as the one taken up by our correspondent is itself a fine simplification—one which leads to various others, through changes in values and taste. The work he is doing may also contribute to a better understanding of science—the sort of science that Michael Polanyi is striving to bring into being. This is science which leaves plenty of room for incommensurables like "life" and general moral ideas like "natural law." It is science that does not want and cannot use "followers," although it always has need of practitioners.

Yet there will be many people who will need to learn to define and think of the "natural" without having to embody it in a primeval relationship with nature, since this is not now possible for everyone. It was quite "natural" for Socrates, for example, to seek out people in the cities, where he could converse with them and try to understand them. An exploration of the different meanings of "natural" will doubtless be a chief activity in the restoration of religion as well as of science.

REVIEW

FIFTY, SIXTY, SEVENTY YEARS AGO

IT is risky to speak of a period of American history as being "golden age," since almost any time in the past can be shown to have had a dark, unpromising side, but the early years of this century now seem sunnier and pleasanter to remember—or to reconstruct from books of recollections—than any other epoch. From the turn of the century until after the first world war, American life had an unspoiled quality. Often the older people of that time remembered knowing Emerson and Whitman; Mark Twain was still alive, and so was William James (both lived until 1910). Reformers were eager and optimistic. While Teddy Roosevelt's expansionist enthusiasm is not at all attractive in retrospect, he gave a colorful wholesomeness to politics that we can hardly imagine today.

One could say that the period was mainly characterized by the fact that the people as a whole believed in a lot of "illusions," but what this overlooks is that they also had various admirable qualities which went with their faith and optimism. There was an unsuspecting warmth in human relationships, and decencies that now seem quite rare. Faith, even if misplaced, is linked with positive moral attitudes which human beings cannot long do without, and even if, sooner or later, a poorly founded faith must break down, the iconoclasts who hack away at its roots ought to have something better to offer. In a world as imperfect as ours, a single builder is worth a dozen or even a hundred zealous critics and destroyers.

There are better reasons than the indulgence of nostalgia for an attempt to recapture the mood and quality of American life from 1900 to 1920. It was a time of wholeness and integrity, and it deserves study in the same way that any "stage of life" does, since each stage is followed by another, and our troubles in the present may be largely traceable to the failure of the American people to

learn from the failure of beliefs which could hardly be questioned at all during the first twenty years of this century.

An utterly delightful book, no doubt out of print, but probably obtainable in libraries, would make a beginning. It is *As Much as I Dare* (Ives Washburn) by Burges Johnson, published in 1944. The author was in the publishing business (first books, then magazines) during the first ten years of the century, and then gradually went into teaching English and literature (mostly at Vassar), which became his profession. He worked first for Putnam, then for Harper's and after serving in various editorial capacities on several magazines, which included *Harper's*, *Everybody's*, *Outing*, *Judge*, and others, turned to teaching. O'Henry was his close friend, and Johnson roomed with Gelett Burgess, who wrote "The Purple Cow." At a dinner given by Teddy Roosevelt to the volunteer writers who had helped with the Bull Moose campaign, the former President told a story which illustrates the humor of the time. Johnson, a Roosevelt supporter, was present and wrote it down:

"John L. Sullivan," said Teddy, "always assumed toward me the attitude of guardian and adviser. He knew that I kept in physical trim by taking boxing lessons in the White House and that warmed his heart. He wrote me letters of advice now and then, on public issues. But finally I got a request for an appointment, and I readily granted it. He had never before asked to see me.

"He was shown into my office and after he had shaken hands sat down with the desk between us. 'Have a cigar, he said, pulling a big black one out of his pocket and reaching it toward me. I thanked him and refused. 'Oh, I've got more with me,' he said; 'have these,' and he fished out two more and put all three on my desk.

"Then he came down to business. It seems that he had a nephew in the army, a musician, and the young man was in trouble. They had him in the guardhouse and were going to try him. 'I don't want to ask any special favors for him,' said John L., 'but I hoped you might look into his case. You see, he never had a fair chance—went wrong from the start. When he was young he took to music."

Years later, living the easier life of an academic, Johnson vacationed one summer in New Mexico, taking his family with him. His son, who was old enough to work and quite employable, came along. Johnson thought he ought to find a job, but the boy said no rancher would hire anyone for only a few weeks. So Johnson, believing in education by example, dressed up in old clothes and wandered into the local chamber of commerce office, asking around for a job. A rancher asked him: "Can you weed cabbage and pick off the bugs?"

The next morning he toiled in the hot sun until noon, when a pleasant older woman brought him a cool drink and asked him to lunch. At the table the woman eyed him curiously:

Finally she said, "What's your name?" I said my name was Johnson.

"Where are you from?"

"Back East."

"What are you doing this for?"

"I want the money," "You might as well come clean," she said. "What's your real name and why are you doing it?"

I felt that I must be a poor actor and wondered whether I looked very much like a college professor.

"My name really is Johnson and I might as well tell you that I am a college teacher. But can't a college teacher need a job in the summer?"

"What college?" she demanded.

"Vassar," I said apologetically.

"Then you know my nephew, Woodbridge Riley," she said.

Woodbridge Riley was professor of philosophy at Vassar and lived two houses away from me on Faculty Row. There was nothing I could do about it. So I confessed that I wanted work in order to prove a point to my son, but I insisted on sticking to my job. I am not sure that I finished out the week but I know they were hospitable folk, and fond of Woodbridge Riley, and no situation under heaven would have permitted them to keep one of his friends picking bugs off their cabbages. I cannot remember whether I ever got money for the work I did. This world is undoubtedly a small place, but I wish its smallness

would not interfere with my efforts to bring up my young properly.

There is no way to convey in a few words the temper of this book, but these quotations give some slight feeling for the man who wrote it, and no one interested in the best years of American magazine publishing and crusading journalism—Lincoln Steffens was well known to the author—can fail to appreciate the memories recorded by Mr. Johnson.

The happy, optimistic days so vividly portrayed in *As Much as I Dare* could not continue after World War I. As Henry F. May says in *The End of American Innocence*:

Few Americans could grasp, and fewer still could admit all that the outbreak of World War meant to them and their ideas. Frank H. Simonds, in the *New Republic*, came as close as any contemporary to seeing in 1914 the dimensions of the disaster. "Is it not a possibility," he asked, "that what is taking place marks quite as complete a bankruptcy of ideas, systems, society, as did the French Revolution?" . . .

Perhaps the most important victim of war was practical idealism, that loosely formulated set of assumptions on which Americans had come to depend so heavily. After 1914 it became increasingly hard to argue that the essential morality of the universe could be shown in the daily course of events. Still more obviously challenged was the special prophetic vision of Social Christianity: the gradual dawn, here on earth of the kingdom of peace and love.

As Mr. May says, *few* Americans could grasp what had happened, or were willing to accept its implications. So, along with the rosy picture presented of the man of that time by Mr. Johnson, a reading of other books is in order. A very different reflection of life in New York during the same period is given in Laura Z. Hobson's remarkable novel, *First Papers*, which deals with the social struggles of New York's poor laboring classes, and the life of one of their champions. These are matters that did not get into the conventional literary works of the times, and they represent some of the unwelcome harvest of the "robber baron" psychology which developed so

rapidly after the Civil War. Other books covering the misery which was largely hidden from most people during that time would include Emma Goldman's *Living My Life* and Alexander Berkman's *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*. The contradictions were all there, but they hardly ever came to the surface of American life, and found ruthless solutions when they did. It was witnessing such solutions that made a radical out of Eugene Debs.

What was the "idealism" that was destroyed by World War I? In *Eleven Against War* (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1969), Sondra Herman speaks of the basic beliefs of the men who had power and were in authority at that time men like Woodrow Wilson, Elihu Root, Nicholas Murray Butler, and others, all members of the League to Enforce Peace. Of the outlook of these men, she wrote:

Men who led the movements for a world court or a league of nations envisioned an international polity united by formal contracts and by a common allegiance to the rule of law. This was not very different from their ideal of American polity as an organization of competing individuals and business corporations with differing degrees of merit and power. In international society the more or less powerful components of the system were the separate sovereign states. Wilson and Butler Root and the leaders of the League to Enforce Peace espoused this viewpoint. They tended to believe that the competition of individuals or of businesses or of nations, and the emergence of the strongest in that competition, while sometimes dangerous, served the interests of the whole society. They placed a high value on stabilizing this competition and on pacifying it. Often they considered wars the work of greedy national leaders or of jingoistic populations.

This was the credo in which national leaders firmly believed during the early years of this century. That it was made out of unworkable formulas and would lead to the disasters visible on every hand is now evident to every thoughtful observer. But back in those days, only a handful of people even suspected that something might be wrong with this credo, while numerous decent men, men with the respect of the public, could

argue for it with both integrity and honest enthusiasm. The sad fact of the present is that, so far as American policy is concerned, the credo has not really changed at all; it has merely grown increasingly unbelievable, which has meant that policies based upon it have become more and more mindless, and the quality of its champions has kept on going down.

COMMENTARY

DEFENDING AN HALLUCINATION

A RECENT mailing from the War Resisters League included a reprint of the first two pages of "The Talk of the Town" in the *New Yorker* for Jan. 17. These early paragraphs are usually the best thing in the magazine. This material, which is no exception, begins:

It has come to light that the United States government and its South Vietnamese allies are planning a mass deportation within South Vietnam that appears virtually certain to open an entirely new and bloody chapter in the Indo-China war. A recent story in the *Times* reveals that a project to deport hundreds of thousands of people—and, in the end, perhaps millions—from the five northernmost provinces of South Vietnam to southern provinces is "now in its final stages."

The *New Yorker* finds this plan completely horrifying, although only an extension on a mass scale of a policy that has been going on for years, and has already resulted in the uprooting of "something like six million Vietnamese from their homes." Even to discuss such a proposal, the *New Yorker* writer says, runs the risk of making it seem somehow "reasonable" or worthy of consideration, but adds:

However, since the current project of mass deportation has moved beyond the option stage and got into the planning stage, one is compelled to discuss it. In fact, it is a striking demonstration of how deeply the nation is sunk in anesthesia when it comes to events in Vietnam that the press and television have failed to comment on this project since it was reported in the *Times*—a project that, if we imagined its being undertaken in the United States, by, say, the Chinese, would consist of deporting the entire population of New England to the Southwest, destroying all the cities and towns defoliating the landscape, and shooting all the people who refused to leave or who hid in the woods.

There is much more, all of it important and clarifying. The main point is that American troops are in Vietnam to defend an hallucination—the idea that the people there want to be defended against the forces of the National Liberation

Front. They don't. The people have supported every insurgent group since the late nineteenth century and they support the NLF. The persons who asked the United States to intervene in Vietnam did not—do not, can not—speak for the Vietnamese people.

A limited number of copies of this *New Yorker* reprint are available free to those who send some postage with their request to the War Resisters League, 339 Lafayette Street, New York, N.Y. 10012.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE?

TURNING the pages of William Glasser's *Reality Therapy*, we stopped at the section on "Treatment" and read it again. This part is directly concerned with Glasser's work at the Ventura School for girls, and it is almost all about how to establish a sense of responsibility. The girls were for the most part seriously delinquent adolescents. Glasser says:

No one doubts that the problem we are dealing with at Ventura is irresponsibility that we must get sufficiently involved with the girls so that they wish to become more responsible, and that we must concurrently provide them with a program in which they can demonstrate their progress. . . .

The philosophy which underlies all treatment at the Ventura School is that mental illness does not exist.

We accept no excuses for irresponsible acts. Students are held responsible for their behavior and cannot escape responsibility on the plea of being emotionally upset, mistreated by mother, neglected by father, or discriminated against by society.

The account of how this treatment works is extremely encouraging, not only in terms of success with the students, but in the comparative rapidity with which the girls make up their minds to become responsible persons and then do it. But two other considerations may occur to the reader. First, these girls were "in custody" and it was possible to control their environment, making it essentially educational in a variety of ways. Second, "responsibility" in this situation means the application of fundamental common sense, and putting an end to law-breaking. How, one wonders, could this approach be used in relation to larger cultural problems where the irresponsibility is of another sort, and no constraints are possible?

Rachel Carson, for example, wrote *Silent Spring* to shock her countrymen into awareness of the irresponsibility of certain industrial undertakings. Ralph Nader's books perform a similar service in other areas, including government agencies. The entire muckraking enterprise—not the least of which

are the books and articles presenting the terrible facts of the war in Vietnam—can be regarded as an endeavor to establish larger conceptions of responsibility, yet it seems clear that all these strenuous and sometimes heroic efforts encounter habits of deeply engrained indifference. Even the youthful rebels against these abuses, for all their moral indignation, have sometimes a curious way of exhibiting "responsibility." As Paul Goodman wrote almost two years ago:

The young are quick to point out the mess we have made but I don't see that they really care about that, as if it were not their mankind. Rather, I see them with the Christmas astronauts flying toward the moon and seeing the earth shining below: it is as if they are about to abandon an old house and therefore it makes no difference if they litter it with beer cans.

Some of them are looking for desert islands where there *is no pollution at all!* They probably won't find any such place; or if they do, it may be hard to find enough to eat there, without regular checks from home. Learning "responsibility" at this level may be a bit more difficult than learning not to steal cars and do other foolish things, under the tutelage of unusual teachers like Dr. Glasser and his colleagues.

The basic problem, it seems evident, is that "responsibility" is simply not in the air, and when it is mentioned, a specific obligation has to be identified, its lesson spelled out and dinned into our ears, until we get the point. In time, that *particular* responsibility may become a kind of fad, supported by the mass media, the public school system, and by precocious ten-year-olds who write letters to their Congressmen and other officials.

The background situation behind all this was well described, if somewhat learnedly, by John Schaar, in his paper on the breakdown of authority and legitimacy in American life. He wrote:

Our founding took place at an advanced stage of the progress toward epistemological and moral individualism. . . . At the time of the founding, the doctrine and sentiment were already widespread that each individual comes into this world morally complete and self-sufficient, clothed with natural rights which are his by birth, and not in need of fellowship for moral growth and fulfillment. The

human material of this new republic consisted of a gathering of men each of whom sought self sufficiency and the satisfaction of his own desires. Wave after wave of immigrants replenished those urges, for to the immigrant, America meant freedom from inherited authorities and freedom to get rich. Community and society meant little more than the ground upon which each man challenged or used others for his own gain. Others were accepted insofar as they were useful to one in his search for self-sufficiency. But once that goal is reached, the less one has to put up with others the better. Millions upon millions of Americans strive for that goal, and, what is more important, base their political views upon it. The state is a convenience in a private search; and when that search seems to succeed, it is no wonder that men tend to deny the desirability of political bonds, of acting together with others for the life that is just for all. We have no mainstream political or moral teaching that tells men they must remain bound to each other even one step beyond the point where those bonds are a drag and a burden on one's personal desires.

It is logical enough that after the totality of all these "personal desires" has produced massive pollutions, disasters, and frustrations affecting the lives of everyone, the generation coming into this unhappy heritage should feel vastly resentful, and righteously indignant at very nearly everything that was done in the past. Why should they feel bound to that past, or think that it was "their mankind" that made all those mistakes? Many of them would like nothing better than to get away.

This is not to suggest that there is anything attractive about the prospect of staying around and helping. But there is really no place to go, any more, and there aren't any easy or inviting alternatives. Those who invent alternatives—and a few are being devised—depend on unusual exercise of the imagination, considerable daring, and a lot of hard work. One thing older people could do, as part of their responsibility, is to try to open the way to more alternatives—opportunities in both livelihood and education for the young. This would set an example of responsibility felt by one generation for another. It is quite conceivable, for example, that industry could undertake educational ventures of one sort or another, giving young employees opportunity to acquire basic skills and training. Some big firms

have done this, but smaller ones could do it too. It has been said for a long, long time that the schools, even the technical schools, are no substitute for on-the-job experience. Why not let that sort of education go on in the place where the work is done? All sorts of variety and innovation might result from experiments of this kind. A lot of industries apply scientific knowledge, and could easily teach it, too.

Such ventures would take some of the pressure off the crowded schools, and mean, also, that the people would be taking back some of the responsibilities they have delegated to the government, over the years.

Another kind of responsibility would lead the older generation to stop holding conferences about how to make the young "more responsible." It's really too late to make the young into anything. Whatever happens, whatever they do, they will do by themselves. Thinking adults might spend their time constructively by developing further studies of the sort John Schaar has begun—learning more about the philosophical and moral impoverishment of this society, with a view to making practical corrections themselves.

At issue is the far-reaching question of the meaning of human life, the fact of the self-destructive habits of the acquisitive society, and the deception—the *disastrous* deception—in the idea that self-interest is a basic law of nature.

We are just beginning to identify the ideas which have guided our society to the crossroads where it finds itself today. It shouldn't be difficult to see what bad ideas they are. Responsibility might be best communicated to the next generation by people who start living by other rules.

FRONTIERS

Fewer Experts Needed

A CHAPTER in *Custer Died for Your Sins*, by Vine Deloria, Jr., tells about the success of some of the Indian tribes in conducting economic ventures on a tribal basis, and how the Pueblos of New Mexico, by maintaining a sense of tribal purpose and solidarity, have developed a healthy community life. This is by no means true of all the Indian groups, but it seems to apply to those unwilling to adapt to the white man's ways. Mr. Deloria, who is a Sioux, believes that the restoration of tribal rights and attitudes is the only possible foundation for Indian survival. He speaks for many when he writes:

Some years ago at a Congressional hearing someone asked Alex Chasing Hawk, a council member of the Cheyenne River Sioux for thirty years, "Just what do you Indians want?" Alex replied, "A leave-us-alone law!!"

The primary goal and need of Indians today is not for someone to feel sorry for us and claim descent from Pocahontas to make us feel better. Nor do we need to be classified as semi-white and have programs and policies made to bleach us further. Nor do we need further studies to see if we are feasible. We need a new policy by Congress acknowledging our right to live in peace, free from arbitrary harassment. We need the public at large to drop the myths in which it has clothed us for so long. We need fewer and fewer "experts" on Indians.

What we need is a cultural leave-us-alone agreement, in spirit and in fact.

Most of Mr. Deloria's book is devoted to retelling the story of white injustice to the Indians, bringing it up to date with an account of the ruinous and stupid "termination" policy of the Government, begun in 1954, under which "help" to the Indians is interpreted to mean detribalization. Very few white men have done much to help the Indians, one notable exception being John Collier, whom the author honors as "the greatest of all Indian Commissioners." Collier was chiefly responsible for the Indian Reorganization Act passed in 1934, which gave

the tribes the beginnings of control over their own destiny.

The title of this book, "Custer Died for Your Sins," taken from an Indian bumper sticker, was meant as a dig at the Christian missionaries, who exhibited a pitiful lack of understanding of Indian culture and religion. Mr. Deloria says:

While the thrust of Christian missions was to save the individual, its result was to shatter Indian societies and destroy the cohesiveness of the Indian communities. Tribes that resisted the overtures of the missionaries seemed to survive. Tribes that converted were never heard of again. Where Christianity failed, and insofar as it failed, Indians were able to withstand the cultural deluge that threatened to engulf them.

Having lived for eighteen years on a reservation himself, this writer knew at first hand about the quality of most of these "saving" efforts. He describes one of them in the story of a female missionary who couldn't get her little Choctaw Sunday School pupils to understand the "technical side of being saved."

In her church, it turned out, there were seven steps to salvation. When one understood the seven steps to salvation and was able to recite the sequence correctly, he was saved. Then his task was to teach others the seven steps until Jesus came. Apparently the Lord would ask all people to recite the seven steps on Judgment Day.

Unfortunately I was not able to give her any insight into the task of getting six-year-old Choctaws to walk the seven steps to salvation, let alone memorize them. I asked her why, if it was so difficult to get them to understand, didn't she move to a field which the Lord had spent more time preparing. She replied that the Baptists had had the children for some time and had left them terribly confused. Her first task had been to correct the heretical theology the Baptists had taught them. She said she wouldn't dream of leaving and letting some other church come in after her and again confuse the children. On such decisive insights is Christian mission to the Indians founded.

Certain sombre reflections may oppress the reader of this book. How long will it be, one wonders, before it will be possible to meet an Indian, or visit an Indian community, without

having unnatural feelings of being both a guilty member of the dominant culture and an intruder? Books like this *have* to be written, and the whites of the United States need to read them, but wholly natural relationships between white people and Indians will hardly be possible until all these things can be legitimately forgotten and the pleasures of simple human contact and enjoyment of one another take their place. Meanwhile, what a burden it must be on men like this writer, to have to be in all aspects of their lives, at once symbols and spokesmen for a cause! Their sympathies and capacities draft them for this role, and they really have no choice. So, the lives of us all are variously distorted by centuries-old wrongs that cry out to be righted, while correction waits and waits on the slow processes of human awakening, and even "good intentions" without depth of understanding sometimes add insult to injury. *Custer Died for Your Sins* needs reading as much for recognition of the mistakes made by the "friends" of the Indians as for any other reason.

It may seem a sudden change of subject to go from what Mr. Deloria speaks of as the "plight" of the Indians to the problems of pollution, but an underlying relationship can be discerned. The same egotism that makes racial arrogance seem perfectly natural lies behind the ruthless "progress" of technology. Writing in the October 1970 issue of *Environment* Sheldon Novick, the editor, tells of the threat to human health of a pesticide called No-Pest Strip, marketed by the Shell Chemical Company, and of the efforts of the Food and Drug Administration to see that the product is adequately labelled with warnings to keep the product away from places where food is prepared or served. Insects are killed by a vapor given off by the strip, which contains a toxic agent called DDVP. The U.S. Public Health Service has spoken of the possible hazard to health of such agents, especially in the case of all-day exposure of persons "to an atmosphere deliberately contaminated by pesticides."

Mr. Novick's report is lengthy, covering the principal events in the efforts of various agencies to control the use of this type of insecticide, through proper labelling. He includes quotation from Congressional hearings showing that while the Pest Regulation Division of the Department of Agriculture took immediate action against one product of this description, and had it removed from the market, the Shell product continued to be sold and remained misbranded in the eyes of the FDA. Since Shell, according to the editor of *Environment*, threatened the magazine with legal action if it published this and another report on DDVP insecticides, his article is carefully documented. Speaking of various delays affecting the preparation of his report, which the magazine has been accumulating material for since the fall of 1969, Mr. Novick says in conclusion:

They have given us a sense of what it must be like to be a regulatory agency dealing not just with one multi-million dollar chemical company, but with many such corporations, manufacturing 45,000 different pesticide products for an almost infinite variety of uses. It is a reasonable question to ask whether any regulation at all is possible in such circumstances, when products are proliferated without restraint, and the manufacturers are relied upon almost entirely to provide the data upon which the safety of such products is judged.

It seems evident that the issue in such problems is not a series of "offenses" that have to be regulated or controlled, but rather a basic attitude toward life and other human beings. "Government bureaus," even though heroically manned, are not equipped with remedies for anything like that.