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THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS

THE meaning of "institution" ranges from high honorific values through a large area of morally neutral "function," down to epithets expressive of alienated contempt. There is obvious truth in Stokely Carmichael's view that what a man thinks about organized society is largely determined by what he sees out the window when he wakes up in the morning. If he sees ugliness, disorder, and the fixed circumstances of human degradation, he is likely to have a low opinion of the institutions which sanction and give stability to such conditions. Then there are other men—a few—who add the projective use of the imagination to what they know from personal experience. These make an attempt to generalize concerning an order in which oppressive conditions would not exist, because of the principles established and embodied in new institutions.

But what is an "institution"? It is an agency for the accumulation and use, or sometimes simply the coordination, of human energy. Since it functions as a focus, it must confine the energy before it can be released for specific purposes. The analogy of an institution to an organ of the human body is plain enough—the institution is a social organ. Analogy, however, is not identity, and while the body and its organs are given to us by nature, institutions are designed by men.

What are the models followed in the creation of institutions? To answer this question with any completeness would involve study of the social history of all mankind, beginning as far back as we are able to go. It would also require review of every past theory of human nature and every doctrine of man's relationship with nature. This can hardly be attempted here.

Another way of getting into the subject would be to make a loose classification of the different kinds of institutions. We might say that there are institutions which originate, institutions which preserve and order, and institutions which destroy and clear away the obstacles to new beginnings. Then we might add a fourth kind—institutions devoted to the meaning, value, and the interrelation of all the other activities.

To illustrate: the first kind of institution would include constitutional conventions, planning bodies, conferences for the founding of schools, or any deliberate collection of human intelligence for the purpose of bringing something new into being. Two or three men who together consider where to dig the village well are a prototype of an originating institution. An interstate commerce commission is an example of the preservative and regulative institution. The Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society embody these principles at another level. An association of physicians, formed for the sharing and advance of medical knowledge, fulfills the preservative function. The courts and the police departments are in this category; likewise the schools.

Wreckers, scavengers, organizations for the disposal of waste, burial societies, war colleges, and armies—"the job of the Marine Corps is to kill"—embody the destructive function. In sane societies, destructive institutions are valued by what they contribute to normal creative and preservative activities. An American authority on naval warfare, Admiral Mahan, voiced what now seems an incredibly ingenuous euphemism: "The province of force in human affairs is to give moral ideas time to take root."

Philosophical associations, religious bodies, and universities are institutions devoted to meaning. Their actual function varies a great deal—which is true of all other institutions—but traditionally the role of these institutions has been either to display or to seek understanding of the overall meanings in all aspects of the human enterprise—to give consideration to the issue of authority in respect to meaning, to attempt to distinguish between certainties and uncertainties, and to afford what help is possible for human decision, individual and

collective, through the unprejudiced array of alternatives.

The historical role of institutions devoted to meaning comes luridly alive with the use of words like "imperialism," "theocracy," "organic state," "ivory tower," "eggheads," "priestcraft," "Multiversity," "Church-and-State," etc. It seems that the more elevated the role of a social institution, the greater its potential for infamy and human betrayal. When possession of "the truth" is made the justification for the exercise of power—a justification with great plausibility—the misuse of power becomes ambiguous. What for one man is a necessity of order is seen by another as a crime against mankind. A worse situation is hardly conceivable, since it results in the stultification by anger and fear of all the delicate and fragile growing-tips of constructive change. When this happens, the need for change becomes massive, but it must await the accumulation of angry emotions, which finally burst forth in nihilist demands for an end to all pretensions to "truth," with a passionate contempt for restraining "reason" and little more than casual concern for "order." Since these ideas have for so long been identified with perversion and betrayal, they now seem to compromise revolutionary fervor at its source.

But what the history of the revolutionary movements of the past fifty years has made plain is the fact that no society can continue at all, whatever the new revolutionary form, without new institutions and some practical substitute for the idea of "truth." Meanwhile the defects of institutions born in a matrix of anger are slowly becoming manifest, since they operate under a hard and coarse logic which gives little room for the free play of the imagination. It is in the light of this realization that another kind of thinking about institutions becomes possible and necessary.

The self-consciousness of human beings is the foundation of the study of history and of the deduction of meaning from experience, and is thus the source of all attempts to point to "truth." The last, great, common effort of mankind in this direction was the development of the institution of Science, the purpose of which was to put "truth" beyond dispute. The establishment of scientific undertakings was accompanied by an equally determined effort to decentralize and rationalize power through the political institution of democracy. Today, however, after some two hundred years of these efforts, a decline of faith in their underlying assumptions is becoming evident in various ways—as, for example, in the refusal of many scientists, as logical positivists, to have anything to do with the idea of "truth" in the sense it is cherished by ordinary men, in the passive acceptance of naked power as the only means of "getting things done," and, finally, in the gradual spread of anti-institutional attitudes that seem to subsist on little more than the moral atmosphere of deep human longing.

Does the present, in this characterization, differ in any respect from earlier intervals of far-reaching social change?

It seems right to say that the only important difference lies in an increased self-consciousness—in the growing realization that the delegation of decision to specialized institutions is a fundamental dilemma-making activity of human beings, and at the same time the order-making activity we are not able to dispense with.

This, then, or at least this, is what we are "given," in nature or experience, in respect to institutions. Experience does not tell us what sort of institutions we ought to make, but only that we are compelled to make *some* sort.

Does experience tell us what, in general, we may reasonably expect *of* institutions? History is filled with what men have hoped of institutions, and is also fairly explicit in showing that these hopes have been excessive.

So, it is a fair question to ask how institutions go wrong. But is this the right question? Conceivably, by asking only this question we might achieve certain plausible answers repeating in new language the old conclusion that those who possess the truth are entitled to power. Should we, instead, look again at the question of "truth"? Ignoring the claim that this is an old and insoluble problem, we might consider that even if we cannot tell *what* truth is, it may be

possible to accumulate more grasp than we have now about how truth "works."

There is for example a study of psychotherapeutic activity as carried on in recent years which reveals some intensely interesting things about the preservative and restorative function of psychoanalytical treatment. In the *Personnel and Guidance Journal* for February, Edward A. Dreyfuss, a staff psychologist at the UCLA Student Counseling Center, summarizes recent research on what he calls the factor of "humanness" in psychotherapy, disclosing that this factor seems more important than anything else in giving help. The literature shows, further, that among experienced therapists, regardless of "school," there is no significant difference in opinion as to the ideal therapeutic relationship. The crucial element is this "humanness." From the researches reported and those of his own, Mr. Dreyfuss found:

> These investigations suggest that trying to extract significant differences among therapists of different schools is a fruitless enterprise. The only real differences that seem to exist among experienced therapists as a group are semantic. That is, therapists differ insofar as the name they apply to themselves (*e.g.,* Freudian, Rogerian, Sullivanian) and the theoretical language they speak. While they may differ in theory, however, they do not seem to differ significantly in their overall practice.

Mr. Dreyfuss develops this finding, making various distinctions, but here the important consideration is the apparent masking of the crucial quality of the psychotherapeutic healer by the institutional variation of his "school." No doubt many therapists find this out for themselves, yet the realization tends to remain a secret because of the virtually ineffable meaning of "humanness." Mr. Dreyfuss observes:

> What does it mean for the therapist to be human in psychotherapy? Some may argue that one need not be a therapist in order to be human; that psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, and ministers do not have a monopoly on humanness. Obviously this is quite true. All people have the potential for being human, but not all people can *be* human, *i.e.,* allow themselves to be a *human* being. In our society, the humanness of people is forced into a subservient position to more materialistic needs and is not permitted to emerge. People tend to distrust humanness in others (Moustakas, 1962); they distrust the feelings of others as well as their own.

"Humanness" is here spoken of as the capacity and willingness for self-disclosure. It involves increasing self-awareness, sensitivity, and spontaneity. "Technique," in therapy, Mr. Dreyfuss proposes, easily becomes a barrier between the therapist and the patient, and he adds that if "no one technique is more effective than any other, it seems ludicrous to teach technique." Then he says: "One can teach theory, but not humanness."

This discussion—besides putting us back at our old stand with Socrates in the agora, wondering about the teaching of "virtue"—throws light on the comparatively constant failure of communication between technologists and humanists in the argument about the "two cultures." The man who knows techniques and who represents the action programs of the institutions which "get things done" is seldom able to comprehend the over-all dehumanizing effects, not of the techniques themselves, but of the assumption that techniques can take the place of an enduring quest for *humanness.*

There may be some kind of an alchemical mystery here. The solvent of a humanizing presence within an institution may give that institution the appearance of having captured certain secrets of the good life, suggesting that what happens "through" the institution is only a kind of accident of history. At the same time, we can see that the practical focusing functions of institutions are essential, if only as avenues of contact with one another.

But why can't we study "being human," isolate and define exactly what this means, and then teach it like any other subject? The answer must be, because it is not like any other subject. This inquiry is surrounded by difficulty. How long have thoughtful men tried to explain, with small success, why theology is not the same as religion?

But could we, on the other hand, show with objective evidence that past institutionalization of the idea of truth, whether by science or religion, has been responsible for the fact that some people,

perhaps many, do not "allow themselves to be a *human* being"?

Right now, it would probably be a mistake to try to do more than generate *wondering* about such questions. For this would amount to a negative quest for the equally indefinable virtues of individual human beings—qualities which are somehow made ordinary and trite by being named or defined. We need, in short, to maintain a respectful distance from the kind of truth we need, in order not to spoil it by eager handling.

But even this "wondering," if seriously pursued, would accomplish great changes in our attitude toward institutions. We would begin to regard them as merely the bodies, the external shell, of our common humanity. They might sometimes have the majesty of memorials to the human spirit, but would never rise to sovereignty or control.

A species of "carelessness" would certainly be a consequence of growing into this view—a carelessness of the sort which puzzled the neighbors of Thoreau, whose indifference to the external values established by social institutions has both attracted and repelled his countrymen ever since. In short, the attempt to give content to "humanness" can succeed only by pursuing a kind of humanist *via negativa,* since positive identifications are too easily made into material for somebody's objectifying curriculum. This does not mean that we cannot speak in words of the Great Simplicities or the Eternal Verities, but only that the words must never be a betraying prose.

Now this may seem the stark rhetoric of an extreme restraint and an equally extreme rejection of the help of institutions. But we may need to take a completely uncompromising stance because of the enormous impatience for cash-in solutions which the claims of technological and institutional progress have seemed to justify. Disappointed and disillusioned men have the curious habit of demanding of philosophic remedies the same efficiency and dispatch that was promised by remedies which have utterly failed. Meanwhile, to talk of individual dignity without learning and accepting the full implications of individual responsibility is simply a change of names for the doctrine of pie-in-the-sky. Vicarious atonement does not become a workable principle by a change of sponsors, while the passivity which results from believing in it is equally great.

So far as the critical study of institutions is concerned, this will probably be of value only through a prior study of the nature of man, in order to understand why institutions eventually exert an emasculating influence on human beings. It is true enough that the lives of people are so involved in institutional structures and processes, their sense of reality and identity so closely interwoven with activities shaped by institutions, that the gaining of psychological independence will be a slow and laborious task. What may be difficult to see, at first, is that even a simple recognition that this is the task should have an enormously liberating effect. To begin to become psychologically independent of institutions is not to destroy them—destroying institutions is only another kind of bondage to them. They do not matter—and yet they do.

No doubt there will be some division of labor in all this. Yet the heightening of self-consciousness, which is the identifying characteristic of the present, promises a kind of democratization of self-knowledge. Tiny increments of change at the center, in individual attitude toward the external environment, when projected along the arcs which determine institutional relationships may have a surprisingly far-reaching effect. The distance from the individual to the social periphery might then mediate not breakdown and failure, but viable interchange of understanding and success. How else is the exhilarating atmosphere of high culture supplied with its vital currents?

REVIEW
DANILO DOLCI

THE suggestion of Clark Moustakas (in *The Authentic Teacher*) that there are situations in which "the meaning of betrayal is so twisted that we are more afraid of the truth than the lie, and more shocked by sensitivity and kindness than by violence and brutality," gives the essential clue to an understanding of the life-work of Danilo Dolci. James McNeish's book, *Fire Under the Ashes* (Beacon, 1966, $5.95), is an account of Dolci's life by one of his coworkers, and has long been needed. The brief characterization of Dolci as a Sicilian Gandhi, while not inaccurate, wants amplification. Simply to call Dolci a Gandhi may be to overlook the man's spontaneous moral inventiveness, and he becomes a better confirmation of Gandhi's extraordinary faith in human beings if his independent vision and inspiration are fully recognized.

Dolci is now forty-three years old. He was born in 1924 of a Slav mother and an Italian father, in a town near Trieste. As a boy he rose every morning at four and read for two hours, then ate breakfast and went back to reading until it was time for school. Mr. McNeish relates:

> In his sixteenth year he read close to three hundred titles—all the Italian classics, Goethe, Schiller, Tolstoy, Ibsen, Shakespeare. Simultaneously he studied the history of art and crossed into fresh religious worlds, wanting to understand how so many other millions outside Italy might live according to vastly different, yet firmly established patterns of conduct. He read the Bible and the Koran, turned to Tao, Confucius, and the teachings of Buddha. He read all seven hundred stanzas of the *Bhagavad Gita,* the work which half a century before had become Gandhi's spiritual reference book.

At nineteen, expecting to be called for military service, he left home for Rome, taking with him for companions Mazzini's *The Rights and Duties of Man* and *The Imitation of Christ* by à Kempis. A few years later he did report for service at a barracks at Siena, but at once explained that he regarded military training as preparation for "organized murder." He would do "no shooting and no bayonet practice," he said. His only contribution to the military, during this three months' stint; was the design of a new regimental standard—he was then practically a graduate architect—in which "the eagles' heads were enormous, the talons fiercely predatory."

Dolci's apprenticeship for his career in the arts of human regeneration was served with Don Zeno in northern Italy, near Modena, at Nomodelphia—the place where "fraternity is law." Nomodelphia is a community of children who have been abandoned or orphaned by war, and are cared for by volunteer foster mothers and held together by its founder, an extraordinary anti-fascist priest who during the war had a price on his head. When Dolci joined Don Zeno in 1949 "he found fourteen hundred children in the care of sixty mothers and three thousand more abandoned children waiting to be admitted." Dolci worked so hard for these children at Nomodelphia, building for them, and teaching, that he often was too tired to eat at night. The response to care and love of these once-neglected, vagabond children opened his eyes:

> "I remember one essay, by a boy of about eleven. He wrote, 'Our parents are the trunks and the roots and the branches. We are the leaves and the flowers. Without us they can't live.' Usually we think that a child can't live without *us*, but this lad had understood perfectly the reciprocity of life. *Incredible* intuition."

Already, it seems clear, Dolci's life had gained an unchangeable direction. What to others was regarded as "sacrifice" and "good works" had become for him as normal as breathing. He could do nothing else with his energies. He left Nomodelphia only because Don Zeno would not take in non-Catholic children. Remembering from a visit years before the poverty he had seen at the fishing village of Trappeto, in Sicily, he wrote to some fishermen there that he was coming. Before he went, Don Zeno warned him: "If you go south, Danilo, I think these are places you have to live in

for a long, long, time before you begin to understand them. . . ."

Dolci arrived in Trappeto in February of 1952, bringing with him a few old clothes and the equivalent of five cents in lire. "I've come to live among you, as a brother," he told the fishermen he knew. The poverty, filth, and demoralization in Trappeto were beyond belief, while the deepest conviction of the people was of the impossibility of any change in their condition. There were two paralyzing constants in their lives—none of the men had enough work, and malnutrition was evident in practically all the children. Dolci said he would build "a house where the needy would be fed and clothed and live together in brotherly love, which was the basis of true religion." It would be a "community." The people did not understand him, but they showed him a site for the house. Dolci went north, borrowed enough for a down payment on the land from his former professor of architecture, returned, put up a tent on the site, and began to accumulate building materials on credit. In time, construction progressed. But meanwhile he saw children around him sicken and die. Stark hunger was daily before his eyes.

As soon as the "community" house was built, homeless people and children moved in. Many of the children were of men in prison. With the help of the women, the children were fed, bathed, and taught. But while the house, which Dolci called *Borgo di Dio* (Hamlet of God), became a bright oasis, it did not change the conditions of Trappeto. He was feeding and helping a few of the children, but fathers were still without work. He saw that there could be more work on the land if water was supplied. So he planned an irrigation project which would pump water from the River Iato, and sought other means for employment. But this was change, and change was inconceivable. So Dolci began his first fast. Explaining, he wrote:

> . . . rather than see another child die of hunger I would rather die myself. As from today I will not eat another mouthful until the $50,400 required to employ the neediest and help the most urgent cases has arrived.
>
> When someone is about to shoot down a child, and there's no other way, shouldn't you throw yourself in front to save it? . . . .
>
> It is too late to go on waiting. Waiting only means more corpses. If I, by living, cannot awaken people's love, then by dying I will arouse their remorse. . . .

It was not until a doctor declared that Dolci was indeed dying that the Sicilian authorities promised to give help. And some help came. Plans were made for the irrigation system and food and medicines were brought for the children. But this help had the effect of revealing the deeper kind of problems that now all the world is discovering. Dolci realized that "help" was not enough. What was needed was basic change—the kind of change that would enable the peasants and fishermen to help themselves. And while "Christian charity" anyone could understand and tolerate, *social change* invariably took on the character of a crime against both Church and State.

It was at this point, and because of this discussion, that Dolci's work began to gain the attention of the world. There is no way to convey the opposition confronting Dolci, save by reading James McNeish's descriptions of encounter after encounter—with Italian officialdom, with the authorities of the Church, and, eventually, with all-pervasive power of the Mafia. The campaign which first aroused the wide-spread attention of the press was Dolci's "strike in reverse." During a second fast undertaken to spur government action to dam the Iato River, Dolci happened to read the new Italian post-war Constitution. It begins: "Italy is a democratic republic, founded on work." Article IV declares the right of all citizens to work and promises the conditions to make this right effective. A great light came to Dolci. The thing to do, he said to himself, was to *obey* the law—not break it to get attention. He asked the peasants what public work needed to be done, and

they pointed out a road—in Partinico, where he now lived—which became impassable after heavy rains. He organized a work-crew of peasants to repair this road! Such unauthorized public service was regarded as an outrage and brought out the police in force, Insistent voluntary work on the road eventually led to a dramatic trial of Dolci and several of his "henchmen." The final arrest was accomplished with four hundred armed policemen who surrounded two hundred jobless Sicilians with only work tools—they had left their pen knives home to prevent any charge of carrying dangerous weapons.

The trial made the name Dolci known to the responsible people of Italy. Fifty lawyers volunteered to defend him. The case was taken by a group of six, including the most distinguished civil lawyer in Italy. Philosophers and literary figures came to testify to Dolci's character. Silone, ill, sent word that "The world of culture is on Danilo's side." Carlo Levi, author of *Christ Stopped at Eboli,* spoke in his behalf. It became evident that not Dolci and his penniless peasants, but Italy, was on trial. The courtroom was swept by emotion. All the serious charges were dismissed. Dolci and the others were convicted of trespassing and inciting to an offense, and then released, since they had already been in jail a time equal to the penalty imposed.

The story continues with Dolci's return to Partinico and to work, for if the world now knew and respected him, this was not true of the Sicilian authorities. The Center he had founded in Partinico grew, and with help from Italian admirers and from abroad it became a headquarters for social research, practical assistance to the needy, an after-hours school for children, and a place of training for Dolci's many helpers, who were now coming from all Europe. Committees were formed in other countries to raise funds for his work. Dolci wrote book after book, describing the unimaginable conditions in Sicily—*Report from Palermo* is one. He enlarged the plan for irrigation to include great dams on three rivers, and he fasted until, despite the almost untraceable opposition of the *Mafia,* actual construction of the first dam project, on the Iato, was finally assured.

Fire Under the Ashes has fascinating chapters on the unpredictable intuitions of Dolci, on the difficulties of projects which grow from practically nothing, and of a resolve which generates action out of little more than the raw materials of despair. This book seems unique in showing the success of unconventional methods of social reform and regeneration, and in situations so chaotic and filled with contradiction that not even a beginning could have been made without Dolci's moral genius.

Toward the end of the book, Mr. McNeish says of Dolci:

> He makes a mockery of the thesis that only the bad are interesting. Nothing about him is small, especially the failings, but in the end the limitations shrink and it does not seem to matter that he burns up colleagues or meddles or is a bad administrator—one is dealing with a typhoon, not a tally clerk; in the end it is the saga of goodness that takes over, with all the infinite variations he is able to ring on the theme. After a time, watching him biting on the kernel of living, getting rid of obstacles like spitting out the shell, one ceases to be amazed and accepts the fact that time and circumstance have created someone quite heroic. What matters, it seem to me, is the original total sacrifice—this and the courage and the awesome tenacity of purpose.

Dolci would be the first to say that his work is but barely begun. This book must be read to grasp the task that he has undertaken—which is nothing less than a change in the very fabric of habitual daily life. Dolci believes and infects others with the view that *of course* this must be done.

COMMENTARY
MORE ON DOLCI

THERE can be no excuse for not devoting this brief space to more material on Danilo Dolci, from Mr. McNeish's splendid book—a book, it seems to us, which should have the widest possible circulation. *Fire Under the Ashes* informs and energizes the reader.

After 1963, Dolci turned more and more to clarifying his pacifist ideas and his theory of group protests. Mr. McNeish writes musingly of this period:

> "What's the use of working towards nonviolent education when a war will probably break out long before?" an Israeli economist said to him. Dolci replied: "The greater the popular voice, the greater the chance that those at the top will think twice. And even if there is no hope, *we* must act as sane people."
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> "For better or for worse, all my problems are problems of quality," he told me. "I'm all right in the big things; it's the little things that worry me." Little things irked him. Conferences at which delegates "smelled of onions and old underwear" and talked of "purity"; fanatics who abused language and said things like "We must *work the masses* up into nonviolence." He sat at meetings in unflinching concentration making notes, despairing of small talk, smiling wanly at jokes, never getting ill. Once he had flu for half a day. "Not longer?" a friend said. "No," he replied. "I don't let it last longer."
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> Some people thought his task as a writer, as a poet of denunciation, was over. Basically it was. But he could not afford to relax. The social stagnation of Sicily had its counterparts all over the globe, in central and southern Spain, in Greece, the Middle East, in Latin America, and many parts of Africa. The idea of codifying a nonviolent technique with far-reaching influence preoccupied him. It was important, while maintaining an educational framework, to knit his organization into a tight yet flexible pacifist propulsion-center.
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> "Dolci is no longer a Gandhi, he is more a Nehru," observers began to say. It was a fallacy. He did not have Gandhi's mistrust of technology nor was he the complete ascetic; but in all other respects he was more Gandhian than ever. . . . Christopher Driver has written that the reason the British anti-Bomb movement failed to develop organically is that the movement "never found a Gandhi." After many years the Dolci movement was evolving creatively because it had one. . . .
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> There is probably no man living who can galvanize deadened or recalcitrant human material as creatively as does Dolci. It is not so much that he makes the Government look sheepish. Rather, that he has perfected a technique of civil resistance which enables the people consistently to shame the Government into action.
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> It is a gentle way, the way of the peacebuilder. . .

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE ROBOT IN THE PARLOR

IN a letter to a newspaper, a disenchanted patron of the popular arts recently described a TV program involving interviews with children, in which a child of five or six was asked: "What does the saying, Happy as a lark, mean to you?"

The answer came, "without hesitation"—"Cigarettes."

The writer of the letter seemed mainly upset by this evidence of mind-dominating promotion of the wicked weed, but the larger conclusion to be drawn is that the network of association for the present generation of children, and those to come, is filled with the artificial imagery of commercial advertising, and that these references are practically inescapable for any child born into an environment steeped in the psychological influences of Western civilization.

This result is by no means an accidental result of children watching programs (or reading ads) intended for adults. It is often pointed out in the journals of the advertising profession that the minds of the young are impressionable, and that the creators of markets for the "long pull" are well-advised to "close in" on the susceptibilities of children. An artist friend who collects evidence of the commercial cultivation of the young recently sent us a sample of the claims of publishers of comic books, in which the appeal for budget allowance begins with an enormous headline: IT'S EASIER TO PUT A *YEN* IN A *YOUNGSTER.*

The text continues:

> Young people are like adults . . . except in one important respect. Like adults, they want to be strong and healthy, smart and popular, . . . *but they're much more receptive, more easily told and sold.* Equipped as they are, with both the wants and the wherewithal, they constitute a mighty market *today* . . . and promise to be continuing customers tomorrow. Incidentally, their hold on their parents' heartstrings gives youngsters a mighty grip on the family purse-strings, too!

This kind of suasion on the decision-makers in advertising is now no novelty, but practically a settled principle of farsighted commercial success. In the *Nation* for Oct. 8, 1955, a writer who was also an advertising man, Joseph J. Seldin, described a survey which disclosed that bright little four-year-olds already had their minds made up concerning the "best" brands of toothpaste, washing powder, and coffee. Armed with this important discovery—practically an "insight" for a progressive advertising man—the firm making the survey touted its services in this "only in America" field of opportunity:

> Where else is brand consciousness fixed so firmly in the minds of four-year-old tots? How many pre-school Americans are pre-sold on how many different products? What is it worth to a manufacturer who can close in on this juvenile audience and continue to sell it under controlled conditions, year after year, right up to its attainment of adulthood and full-fledged buyer status? It CAN be done. Interested?

It is obvious that the gods of the market place represent the only orthodoxy that is acceptable to practically all. As Mr. Seldin observes:

> Manipulation of children's minds in the fields of religion and politics would touch off a parental storm of protest and a rash of Congressional investigations. But in the world of commerce, children are fair game and legitimate prey.

Obviously, again, if Mr. Seldin is right—and how will you show him wrong?—there is little to be gained through heroic attempts to "control" or "regulate" the advertising profession in such activities, since most people seem to regard them as either harmless or even necessary supports of the "American Way." What parents who disapprove are up against is the difficult project of creating a countervailing cultural atmosphere—a fluid medium of attitudes and values with sufficient intensity to generate resistances in the children. It isn't that the *products* are no good, or that "selling" them is somehow immoral. The vicious wrong lies in the monopolistic saturation

of children's psyches with imagery that is fulfilled only by acts of acquisition. In this sense, Marshall McLuhan is absolutely right—the medium *is* the message. And the intent behind this message is to turn human beings into pliable responders to the conditioned reflex. This is all that the advertiser is interested in, and the basis and sustaining power of the whole, vast industry of marketing communications.

The extent of this saturation is made clear by Mr. McLuhan, who compares the psychologically engulfing communications of the electronic media with the pre-literate oral culture of the past. Total sensory absorption is the thing. By means of radio and television, he argues, we are regaining full emotional immediacy in communication. These media free us from the isolating abstractions of the printed page, and end the delays of laborious intellectual processes, which he seems to regard as unnecessary. What we used to have to read about just "floods in."

But what Mr. McLuhan fails to point out—supposing his comparison to have some validity—is the enormous difference between the content of the oral and visual communications of the saga-singer, the town crier, the storyteller, and other transmitters of myth, community values, and symbols of meaning, and the calculatingly aimed and systematically superficial (to reach the *largest* audience) oral and visual images of all-dominating commercial institutions.

What is all this in aid of—an argument for keeping TV sets out of the home? It might be. A lot depends upon how soiled it makes people feel to have one around. The defense of "judicious use" doubtless has merit, and there is certainly abstract validity in the abstract claim that TV could be, and sometimes is, a transmitter of fine educational and cultural influences. But the fact remains that for some people, having a TV seems like harboring a robotized fifth column in your home.

What about the obligation to children? Grade-school children are likely to feel "deprived" if they are the only ones in the entire community or neighborhood whose parents have no TV. Often they will visit friends' houses to watch certain programs, and there may be quite vocal complaints. But a few years later, sometimes, there comes the noticeable reward of a young person who is totally indifferent to the hypnotic spell of television and has filled his life with more self-reliant activities.

Yet one can hardly offer "rules" on such questions. There are various ways of making paths through jungles, and what seems most important is the recognition that, for all its cosmetic glitter, the commercial culture we live in is both barbarous and seductive, and the great problem is to maintain some kind of standard for selection of the influences to which the young are exposed, without too much moralistic isolation, and without developing sour and angry attitudes toward the human beings who have been made captive by the pretenses and ostentations of the age.

FRONTIERS

The Need for Tolerance

IF we respect our fellowmen and the personal nature of truth, we need not think tolerance to be a virtue. It is implied in the consideration we show others and in the acceptance of the fact that anyone concerned with truth will consider true only that which his own experience and understanding reveal to him.

Intolerance has always been directed against ideas; yet it has caused suffering and death to individuals. Ideas cannot be killed by killing their adherents. And the concept of tolerance itself bears the seeds of intolerance: it concedes to some the right to sit in judgment on others and *tolerate* their views.

We are frequently told that no tolerance must be shown to the intolerant. Germany is cited as an example, where the *laissez-faire* attitude of the Weimar Republic is said to have made possible the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. Anyone who realizes that a parliamentary system cannot exist in a country where two thirds of the population support anti-parliamentarian movements, will not blame tolerance for the success of the Nazis.

Yet the demand for unconditional tolerance must be subject to one qualification: we should not "tolerate" or "respect" the ideas themselves, only the right of our fellowmen to think and speak as they see fit. It is often suggested that respect for others implies respect for their views. This argument is fallacious—we respect the person who, in the course of his life, may subscribe to various ideas; we respect his right to utter views alien to us. From this, however, no obligation can be deduced that the views themselves should be respected. Were it not so we should be obliged to respect the anti-human ordinances of Roman Catholicism, Fascism, National Socialism or Bolshevism. We do not deny their supporters the right to express these doctrines; all the same, we consider the latter extremely dangerous to ourselves, our environment and, indirectly, to their adherents as well. Just as we do not deny their right to voice views we abhor, we should not wish to deny our own right to express opposition. "Tolerance" towards the intolerant, if it meant condoning their ideals, would be the end of all thought which is unwilling to destroy its opponents.

Another popular fallacy is the call that we should not attack the other fellow's view because he is "sincere." The absolute ones, the intolerant dogmatics, are always sincere. Only the sceptical mind can become guilty of "insincerity," while the fighter for the over-rule will overrule all doubts—even in himself. I am certain Mussolini and Hitler were sincere men, in that they rationalized their actions to their own satisfaction: they persuaded themselves that by destroying their enemies they were serving the community.

Anybody who knows *the* truth will act with ruthless intolerance. After all, men need the Truth, he would argue, and the sceptic? the doubter and the opponent step between the herald of the truth and the people who need it. The obvious solution, always acted upon, is to render the opponent harmless and, if necessary, to eliminate him. This course has been taken by every servant of revealed, established or realised truth, if it was in his power.

Then there is the lazy view of the "fair-minded": some truth is to be found in every idea. We are often tempted to allow some aspect of truth to a person of whom we are fond. The value of any concept or proposition is in its context. An opinion is either valid or invalid, it either has inner consistency or contains inner contradictions. For example, the opinion that God exists or does not exist, cannot be faulted, because it does not contain an inner inconsistency. The idea that God is good, or that God is love, can easily be shown to express an inner contradiction which makes it false.

It is not particularly dangerous to us if our fellowman believes that God is love. But when he thinks that war is the inevitable order of things, or that Negroes are inferior, or that unions without benefit of clergy are sinful, he contributes to a development which endangers us and society as a whole. By opposing his view, we serve ourselves, our environment and, indirectly, him.

We often find that youthful idealism and good-will leads people to join radical political movements in the belief that thus they are serving an aim with which they substantially agree. Rightly or wrongly, we hold that such political movements are not the vehicles of the ideals they claim to represent. Most leaders of the Roman Catholic Church are a greater danger to the

teaching attributed to Jesus than the most outspoken atheist. Stalin was surely more dangerous to Communism than LBJ could ever be. Mr. Wilson is more detrimental to the ideas of democratic socialism than Mr. Heath. If our friend's idealism persuades him to support the Catholic Church, or Stalin, or Wilson, we are justified in calling his attention to the mistake implicit in his words and actions. To keep an accommodating silence would be a great disservice to him.

Another frequent objection to "non-conformist" views is that we should abstain from destroying anyone's belief unless we can replace it by a "better one." We do not know what "better" views are unless we take it for granted that our own views *are* the better ones. People usually do. On the other hand, we cannot possibly "take away" a person's belief. If he accepts our argument without wanting a substitute opinion, we have not deprived him of anything, merely freed his mind from a block which blurs his vision of truth.

Our aim should be to help people in their quest for understanding which makes their truths an integral part of their experience and their lives. No external idea, however satisfying, can replace existential truth and only when external dependence is surmounted can a man hope to attain to truth which is genuinely *his.* No longer will he merely accept what he has been told, he will establish it through his own effort. Otherwise he would show that he was more concerned with satisfying his mind by accepting an alien truth.

Finally, there is a hoary argument that anyone who believes that truth is *personal,* should realise that his statements have but limited validity. After all, if we hold truth to be subjective, how can we advance objective propositions?

Indeed, we do *not* believe that our axiomatic statements have more than limited validity. Our opponent's difficulty is that opposite statements have no objective validity either. More than that, opposite statements would contain intrinsic contradictions. We say, for instance, that "truth matters." Our opponent may, of course, indulge in a semantic argument saying that the word "truth" is mere emotive noise. But if he once admits the value of truth, he cannot possibly say that truth does not matter without invalidating his own statement. A person to whom truth does not matter cannot be expected to make truthful statements.

We say that "man is educable." This cannot be proved, but he who wishes to prove its opposite would have to regard his own ability to communicate, to convince, to persuade as *not* given. He who teaches or represents an idea cannot make such a statement.

Again, we say that communication involves an unconditional commitment. If communication is made contingent on the person's satisfying some extraneous condition, then when the arbitrary demand can no longer be met it may be broken off without consideration for the person.

"No truth can be absolute," is another axiom which is unassailable. An absolute truth would be singular, and another content of truth could not be presented as absolute. There can be only one absolute truth, or none. As we have never found one that appears absolute to us we must be satisfied with the assumption that none exists.

We have strayed into a realm which may appear too abstract to our readers. Let us, therefore, "come back to earth."

We have considered the demand for tolerance and decided that it is implicit in our readiness to meet others with consideration, concern and patience. In doing so we shall probably encounter error, deception, ill-will and even hate. We shall, nevertheless, continue to believe that what we are saying is true unless we are shown that it is not. We shall continue to act on the assumption that the other person is important. In communicating with him, we shall express that which appears true to us while considering what he has to say.

It was Nietzsche who provided the soundest principle on this issue: "Let us not always insist on being acknowledged to be right—especially when we *are* right."

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