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IN PLACE OF POWER

TWO observations in recent issues of MANAS—one by Harold Taylor, the other attributed to Martin Dworkin—seem fundamental to any inquiry into ways to better the human condition. In his discussion of the problems of the Unitarian Church, Dr. Taylor remarked that the Unitarian movement grew out of the rejection of dogmatic religion, gaining its energy from people determined to think freely and independently in respect to ultimate questions. And then, in effect, he asked: But what happens after the goal of freedom in religious thought has been attained? Where will the energy come from when dissent is no longer a rousing and unifying issue? It seems evident to him that "dissent is not enough." The time comes when a liberal church—or any movement initiated by the will to freedom—can no longer be "dependent upon the doctrine to which the dissent is addressed."

The observation by Martin Dworkin, quoted by Robert McClintock, is from a different stance but deals with a related problem: the responsibility of radical groups which have as their primary inspiration the fight against oppression. Do they become prone to see "oppression" everywhere, refusing to recognize any good at all in existing situations or relationships? Will they invent reasons for universal dissent? McClintock summarizes the issue:

> As Martin S. Dworkin profoundly points out, the great danger in contemporary radicalism is in the widespread belief that American society, the entire "free" world, has become totalitarian. Men who no longer believe that they are free no longer recognize that they are responsible; in fighting against oppression, it is most easy to convince oneself that all is permitted.

Archetypal examples of the claim that "all is permitted" might be seen in both Lenin and Trotsky, who openly attacked the "eternal truths" of traditional morality, putting in their place the partisan claims of class interest. Defending this position in his pamphlet, *Their Morals and Ours*, Leon Trotsky declared:

> Lenin refused to recognize the moral norms established by slave-owners for their slaves and never observed by the slave-owners themselves; he called upon the proletariat to extend the class struggle into the moral sphere too. Whoever fawns before precepts established by the enemy will never vanquish that enemy!

Trotsky had no reluctance in giving Lenin's precise words on joining and controlling the trade unions in order to make them into revolutionary instruments. Lenin said: "It is necessary to be able . . . to resort to all sorts of devices, manoeuvres, and illegal methods, to evasion and subterfuge, in order to penetrate into the trade unions, to remain in them, and to carry on communist work in them at all costs." Agreeing with Lenin, Trotsky cited his own counsel to some Belgian correspondents, advocating that communists join and undermine the trade unions in that country, explaining that this would require "conspirative measures." The logic of this policy was clear enough—since the capitalist society had been condemned as immoral, there was no need for revolutionists to pay any attention to its moral precepts: only the class morality of the Bolshevik party had validity. The moral ideas of the class enemy were enslaving devices to be ignored on principle.

Much of Trotsky's argument in this pamphlet rests on the proposition that in war craftiness and deception become necessities, and since revolution is war, these methods are completely justified for those who fight for social justice. Trotsky does not abandon all morality, but only the morality of the existing system. He states his position:

> Nevertheless, lying and violence "in themselves" warrant condemnation? Of course, even as does the class society which generates them. A society without social contradictions will naturally be a society

> without lies and violence. However there is no way of building a bridge to that society save by revolutionary, that is, violent means. The revolution itself is a product of class society and of necessity bears its traits. From the point of view of "eternal truths" revolution is of course "anti-moral." But this merely means that idealist morality is counter-revolutionary, that is, in the service of the exploiters.

Reducing this argument to general ideas, we are able to see that right morality is made to depend upon its contribution to revolutionary power. After they gain control, the revolutionists, having eliminated the "contradictions" of society, will then restore the authority of moral ideas which condemn lying and violence; but until that day lying and violence remain the legitimate tools of fighters for freedom!

But it would be deliberate blindness to suppose that only radicals and revolutionists are willing to adopt such means in the interest of gaining power. The nations of the "free world" have not been averse to applying similar methods, claiming that they are obliged to use whatever means the enemy uses, to erase the evil in the world. This argument is quite familiar to Americans, since the claim that "all is permitted" in the service of righteous power was quite recently made by one of the White House witnesses in the Watergate hearings. Actually, a variety of such justifications could be added, one having very wide influence being the statement of Lord Keynes: "For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to every one that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not." Only avarice and usury, Keynes maintained, "can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight." So, competing with "lying and violence," the practice of "avarice and usury" is also claimed as the "bridge" to a better society.

The observer who sees that this "all is permitted" policy is not limited to any particular political persuasion, but emerges wherever *power* is held to be essential to human good, may be strongly tempted to adopt anarchist or at least decentralist views: Reliance on power can easily be recognized as potentially the justification of every conceivable crime. But the anarchists, who exercise a continual influence on thought, have a difficult time in persuading others of the workability of the anarchist theory. What are the positive ideas of the anarchists, which would become the basis of a society involving no coercion, in which voluntary cooperation would supply the forms of order?

To provide an answer to this question, Colin Ward, for years editor of *Anarchy,* contributed a chapter to the recent Anchor volume, *Patterns of Anarchy,* in which he said:

> Anyone can see that there are at least two kinds of organization. There is the kind which is forced on you, the kind which is run from above, and there is the kind which is run from below, which can t *force* you to do anything, and which you are free to join or free to leave alone. We could say that the anarchists are people who want to transform all kinds of human organization into the kind of purely voluntary association where people can pull out and start one of their own if they don't like it. I once, in reviewing that frivolous but useful little book, *Parkinson's Law,* attempted to enunciate four principles behind an anarchist theory of organization: that they should tee (1) voluntary, (2) functional, (3) temporary and (4) small. They should be voluntary for obvious reasons. There is no point in advocating individual freedom and responsibility if we are going to advocate organizations for which membership is mandatory. They should be functional and temporary precisely because permanence is one of those factors which harden the arteries of an organization giving it a vested interest in its own survival, in serving the interests of officeholders rather than its function. They should be small precisely because in small face-to-face groups, the bureaucratizing and hierarchical tendencies inherent in organizations have least opportunity to develop.

Larger enterprises could be undertaken by a federation of such small groups, and to illustrate this Ward suggests the cooperation between the post office departments of various countries, without coercive organizational ties, and the coordination of complicated railway systems, both capitalist and communist, in the Europe of today.

For an example of successful autonomous associations which function well without "bosses," he points to the self-regulating miner groups in the northwest Durham coalfields of England, which plan and execute their own work without difficulty. He also describes the Peckham experiment in London, in which "a horde of undisciplined children" finally settled down into a self-ordering community, after about eight months of running riot and destructive behavior. The point, here, is that given freedom and the power to make their own decisions, in time even children grow capable of ordering their own lives without dictatorial supervision.

We begin to see that the anarchist argument is only externally a political argument; it becomes political mainly as a form of dissent to political injustice and tyranny. Basically, anarchism is a contention or a claim about human nature. It asserts that men are able to govern themselves without arbitrary direction, without the controls applied through fear of punishment and the demands of coercive authority. Kropotkin wrote *Mutual Aid* as a foundation for insisting that voluntary cooperation is indeed a biological law, a natural part of the evolutionary scheme. In its purity, then, anarchism declares faith in individual man and in the free associations of human community, considered apart from the abuses which grow up as a result of the formation of political states and their military establishments.

Quite evidently, anarchist conceptions are closely related to the ideas of the decentralists, who would return both economic and political power to the people by means of small and local enterprise, small communities, and regionalism as the basis for social organization, as contrasted with nationalism and the goals of national sovereignty.

The anarchist argument, if it can be vindicated at all, will probably gain wide support only from a better understanding of human nature; from greater knowledge of what might be called individual and social *moral* psychology, since the anarchist inspiration is quite obviously an expression of moral longing on the part of human beings with a concern for the common good. It also seems plain that the sources of such a psychology will be the humanist psychologists and the high religions which place emphasis on individual self-discovery, and recognize high potentialities in all human beings. Other sources of support for the anarchist outlook would be such thinkers as Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman, Tolstoy, and Gandhi. While these men reveal what could be termed anarcist tendencies, they were not primarily political thinkers. Their thought has political content only in relation to the abuses of political tyranny and the crimes of nations. They see the ultimate solution of human problems as essentially a matter of self-reform and individual discipline and growth.

Yet even the contributions of such illustrious thinkers leave unsolved some major puzzles and contradictions in human nature problems which communitarian generalizations seldom come to grips with. These are encountered only in daily practice and require profound psychological understanding. Something of the nature and extent of such problems is indicated by a passage in A. H. Maslow's *Eupsychian Management* (Richard Irwin, 1965). Maslow is here considering the obstacles to developing good managers for economic enterprise, so long as the goals of more production and profit make it seem desirable to choose persons who are especially able and who rule by natural authority. Under other conditions other goals would seem more feasible, and then there would be less resistance to allowing managers to practice a less directive and authoritative leadership, with more democratic participation. Maslow then says:

> This is a little like saying again that the ideal management policies are best under good conditions in a good world for management of good people. If we had a peaceful, one-world society in which we could patiently work toward the improvement of mankind, then the more participative management would be more desirable, even under this very special condition of admitted superiority.

> I think I could use here my analysis of the paranoid leaders. The general point was to understand why it was that obviously borderline people like Hitler or Stalin or Senator McCarthy or some of the Birchers or people of this sort can gather so many followers. It seemed dear that one reason that they could was because they were so decisive, so sure of themselves, so unwavering, so definite about what they wanted and didn't want, so clear about right and wrong, etc. In a nation in which most people do not have an identity, or a real self, in which they are all confused about right and wrong, about good and evil, in which they are basically uncertain about what they want and what they don't want, then they are apt to admire and succumb to and look for leadership to any person who seems to know definitely what he wants. Since the democratic leader, the non-authoritarian person in general, is apt to be marked by tolerance and admission of ignorance, by willingness to admit that he doesn't know everything, sometimes for less educated people the decisive paranoid authoritarian then can look very attractive and relieve the follower of all anxiety. Quote here the Grand Inquisitor section in Dostoievsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Quote here also David Riesman's "other-directed" person. Also Fromm's robot personality. Well, this is obviously a relevant variable in any discussion of leadership of any kind in any situation.
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> The person who is able to be decisive, who is able to make a decision and then stick to it, who is able to know definitely what he wants . . . who is less influenced by contradiction—such a person is in general more apt to be selected out by others as leader. I think this may be one reason why so frequently obsessional persons are more apt to be chosen as the administrative type or the executive type or the leadership type. They are simply more predictable, more definite about what they like and dislike, less changeable. The fact that this may be for pathological reasons need not be visible to the psychologically unsophisticated person.

These are problems of individual psychology which make the realization of the ideal of self-government involving voluntary acceptance of responsibility quite difficult, and the first step in overcoming such problems is in recognizing that they exist. They are problems similar in kind to the self-deprecating tendencies of the peasants Freire speaks of, in whom the greatest need was for restoration of self-confidence and a realization that they had the capacity to generate their own culture and to understand and meet their own needs.

An Indian sociologist, Sugata Dasgupta, reached conclusions similar to those of Maslow. In *Social Work and Social Change* (Porter Sargent, 1968), Dasgupta reports on two projects of Indian village development, one of them carried on by Gandhian workers with the objective of helping the villagers to arouse in themselves the qualities of independence and leadership that were needed. The social workers on this project acted as catalysts rather than managers; their object was to help the people to recognize their own needs. In the other project, carried on by government workers, the goal was material results. Here the social workers told the people what to do, and while more was accomplished in a shorter time, the methods used seemed to establish an authoritarian structure, leaving the villagers in their inert condition.

In Dasgupta's summary, the first project is called the A group, the second B. Both groups were constituted of a number of closely allied villages:

> The community in B lay passive and the process that held the elements together was not democratic. In A the responsibility and onus of action were with the local leaders and the community. The process was democratic. The former led to substantial physical development, and the latter to inner development of the rural community. It is difficult for a developing nation to choose from among these techniques and types of development, and to say which one it is opting for. There is in fact a national ambivalence in this regard and it has often led to strange conclusions. In their professions, the leaders of the developing societies have always been clear, that the type of development the A group signifies is just what they are looking for; whereas, in their practice, the same leaders and the catalyst bodies have often leaned toward B. Anxious to get results, they have preferred to move forward with physical accomplishments and often ignored the cause of "inner" social development and sustained democratic growth.

Out of these various considerations comes the realization that anarchism requires social circumstances in which people have the best opportunity for full individual development, and that such circumstances cannot be produced simply on revolutionary demand. It also seems apparent that many more than those who call themselves anarchists are working toward a social ideal in which self-determination will be the rule instead of the exception. But what may be learned from those who work in this direction, not as a political goal, but as an educational objective, is that the self-governing social community must be *evolved;* it cannot be installed by a climactic revolutionary achievement. Educators such as Jean Piaget, psychologists such as Maslow, social workers such as Dasgupta and his colleagues, all speak to this point.

From the days of Thomas Jefferson it has been obvious to thoughtful persons that the best government is the least government, and that truly free and responsible citizens need very little of it. What, then, will keep lit the fire of longing and determination to achieve Jefferson's ideal? This question recalls the observation of Harold Taylor, which we spoke of at the beginning. People are not likely to work unceasingly for this ideal without a deep conviction that it is *possible* of realization. Dissent is not enough. A positive conception of human development, of human potentiality, is essential to even a relative achievement of the social community of which the anarchists dream. The idea of man needs rich content, suggestive of the heroic qualities on which realization quite manifestly will depend. Not man as victim, but man as hero; and man, again, as thinker and philosopher, too, for whom the complexities of human nature are no longer sources only of fear, anger, hostility, and self-righteousness. Required, in short, is greater knowledge of the nature of man, in terms of his higher potentialities.

REVIEW
BLAKE: A SHORT APPRECIATION

WHEN William Blake reached his late thirties, he had a mixed reputation as poet, artist and engraver. Writing of his career in the 1790s, Foster Damon says:

> Blake learned a bitter truth: no one cared anything about his visions. As an engraver, he had won a modest place in the world; as a human being, he could find a few friends of a fairly sympathetic sort; as an artist, he could command consideration on occasion; as a poet, he heard some of his early lyrics still repeated; but as a visionary, as a revealer of fundamental truths, he was adjudged at best eccentric, and at worst crazy. His closest companions undoubtedly read his books only out of politeness, and could make nothing of them. Hayley who had promised so well, was the stupidest of them all. The world at large, moreover, seemed to be going to pieces mentally and morally, so nothing could be expected there. But a New Age *must* come, an age when his books would be invaluable as wells of truth. To this New Age, therefore, Blake addressed himself. His lifework was henceforth to be for the Future. To preserve his work, he had to veil it with a brilliant covering of mystery. Only the intelligent should be his audience; for them Blake elaborated his symbols, planned his finest designs, and composed his most wonderful poetry.

There can be no doubt that lovers of Blake are first attracted by the lyrical beauty of his verse, as in the *Songs of Innocence,* or by the unearthly power of his drawings. To say that a work is Blakeian is the highest praise. But then, when one goes to his allegories or, as he named them, his "prophetic" books, barriers to appreciation appear. The complexity of his symbolism seems excessive, the names of his leading figures bizarre. Fortunately, there have been scholars who have made Blake's work their life-study, and in almost every one of them their admiration grew with their understanding. One such writer is Foster Damon, whose book, *William Blake—His Philosophy and Symbols*, issued by Houghton Mifflin in 1924, makes a friendly and understanding introduction to the enjoyment of Blake.

Actually, there may have been certain cultural advantages in Blake's obscurity. Had he been "clear," there would probably be many more Blake cults, and a too eager embracing of the flights of one man's extraordinary imagination. We hardly need more "cults" of any sort, but rather more individuals who dare to think as Blake did, and who have a similar determination to be themselves. He was wholly and deliberately an artist in the highest sense of the word. Blake read earlier poets, and their influence can be discerned in his work, but whatever Blake borrowed he made his own. Damon thinks that Blake renewed the inspiration of English poetry after the long barren period which followed the death of Alexander Pope in 1744. Pope created a fashion which had a deadly effect upon his successors, since no one could possibly approach in excellence what he accomplished. As Damon says, "therefore everybody tried imitation." But Blake found his teachers in the seventeenth century:

> Shakespeare was a real discovery of Blake's. Of course his name was perfectly familiar to scholars, who had done their duty to the public in the form of various editions of the plays; but it was still possible to be ignorant that Shakespeare wrote sonnets and other poems. Dr. Malkin in 1806 noted that "these poems, now little read, were favorite studies of Blake's early days." [Blake was born in 1757.] But Blake did more than read them: he was the first to return to their way of seeing and feeling. He was the first to re-establish in literature the ecstasy, the fresh music of the imagination. And thus he was in the front rank of those who were to rescue English poetry from the decadence of the eighteenth century.

Blake's first book of poems, brought out by his friends, was *Poetical Sketches,* containing poems he wrote between his twelfth and about his twenty-first year. Damon says:

> Blake did not foresee that in this volume he had boldly trodden through the marsh of contemporary verse, well into those mysterious hills where Keats, Shelley, and Tennyson were to follow. The domination of the seventeenth century obscured to him his anticipation of the nineteenth. His strange metrical experiments were not eccentric, but authentic, making a new epoch of versification. The

volume, in short, remains one of the great milestones in the progress of poetry.

What did Blake think of being a "poet"? He thought that poetic expression was the true voice of the divine in man—a quality belonging to all human beings. He also shared the opinion of his friend, Thomas Paine, who had said in *The Age of Reason:*

> There is not throughout the whole book called the Bible any word that describes to us what we call a poet, nor any word that describes what we call poetry. The case is that the word *prophet*, to which later times affixed a new idea, was the Bible word for poet, and the word *prophesying* meant the art of making poetry.

The "new idea" Paine speaks of—that predicting the future is involved—was not Blake's meaning of the term. Blake, Damon says, "believed that true Prophets were simply poets who beheld the eternal truths by power of Imagination."

> His books were not intended for his unworthy contemporaries; his avowed purpose "to speak to future generations by a sublime allegory." He believed (with Swedenborg) that just so the inspired books of the Bible were to be read, besides all such works as the *Bhagavat-Geeta* and the *Timaeus.* He saw a sequence of similar writings throughout the ages, written with precisely this purpose of speaking to the select and keeping silence before the uninitiate: such as the works of St. John, of Trismegistus, Dante, Paracelsus, Jakob Bohme, Milton, and Swedenborg. He intended to continue this series, and he seems to have been its last exemplar.
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> All these writers dealt either with the progress of the individual soul, or with the history of human development. Blake tried to do both at once, to combine the two as mutual symbols for he believed that the whole history of creation is repeated in each individual. The advantage of this theory of Macrocosm and Microcosm is obvious. We care comparatively little about the remote history of the past; but when we learn that it has a living, present significance, we cannot afford to ignore it.

Blake did have wonderful friends, some from whom he learned much. For a time Thomas Taylor, the Platonist, was a close associate. They met regularly with others of their group and Blake attended Taylor's lectures on Plato and the Neoplatonic revival of Plato's teachings. Blake followed Plato and the Gnostics in thinking that the soul of man is imprisoned in a body, and must throw off its confining influence to be restored to a spiritual condition. He believed that "Man is higher than all the gods—that in himself is the only true God"—and that Jesus, as "the only God," is immanent in Man.

It is said that Blake's preoccupation with mystical meaning and allegory harmed his work as an artist. Damon comments:

> This charge is usually over-emphasized, but there is certainly some truth in it. *Jerusalem,* as pure poetry, is obviously inferior to the *Songs of Innocence.* But is it fair to judge a man by standards other than his own? *Blake was not trying to make literature.* His message was far more important to him than its presentation. While the *Songs of Innocence* are exceedingly lovely, they contain only a small amount of doctrine, as compared with *Jerusalem.* Blake's whole progress was toward the Ineffable. . . . Great poet though he was, his interest lay only secondarily in poetry. When he would record some splendid aphorism, such as "Energy is Eternal Delight," he was stating it as a fact, not as a thrill.

Actually, Blake worried about beauty as a barrier to higher perception. He wanted to convey interior meanings, and for this he used allegory, since inner meanings require some effort on the part of the reader or hearer. Blake said:

> Allegory addressed to the intellectual powers, while it is altogether hidden from the corporeal understanding, is my definition of the most sublime poetry. It is also somewhat in the same manner defined by Plato.

One can read enough of Blake, and in books like this one and Kathleen Raine's *Blake and Tradition,* to see how he works, to recognize the depth of his art, and then decide how far to go in mastering the allegories. We have not gone very far, yet find Blake nonetheless fascinating. The versatility of his hand was no less than that of his mind. Since we have said almost nothing of his visual art, we quote this passage from his *Descriptive Catalogue:*

> The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp, and wiry the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art, and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism, and bungling. Great inventors, in all ages, knew this: Protogenes and Apelles knew each other by this line. Raphael and Michelangelo and Albert Dürer are known by this and this alone. The want of this bounding and determinate form evidences the want in the artist's mind. . . . What is it that builds a house and plants a garden, but the definite and the determinate? What is it that distinguishes honesty from knavery, but the hard and wiry line of rectitude and certainty in the actions and intentions?

Damon comments:

> The expressiveness of the line is the great triumph of Blake's work. He rivals the best of the Orientals in his vigorous beauty and his inexhaustible fecundity of invention. On a few inches of paper he could surpass them and approach Michelangelo himself in majesty of design.

Yet it is Blake's reaching after mysteries that holds the reader's attention and leads him on. And sometimes there seem answers to ancient questions. In *The Book of Thel,* the maiden who is a symbol of the unfallen soul descends into the toils of existence; and there, separated from her sisters—

> She ponders over the evanescence of all things. Why is there such a thing as Death? One by one, the Lily of the Valley, the Cloud, and the Clod of Clay answer her: The Cloud dies for the Flower, and the Flower for the Lamb. This is the Mystic Death, the sacrifice of oneself (one's Self) for another, at once the cause and the explanation of Life—Change—in the Universe.

COMMENTARY
THE TRAGIC VIEW

THIS week's lead article ends by suggesting that the struggle for freedom in social arrangements requires the spread of the idea of man as hero. This means that we need to think about the realization of a distant but possibly attainable ideal.

One condition of any such success would be to stop assuming that what is must be taken as a measure of what can be. The statistics of what is define the past, not the future. The description of our world tells us where we have been, not where we may be able to go.

Is there any evidence that we can get there? Well, what sort of evidence would be acceptable? Is the longing for transcendence experienced by so many human beings "evidence"?

Or, we might ask, Why is Tragedy the dramatic form that has the greatest hold on our feelings? To what in human beings does tragedy speak? What rises from the ashes of failure and defeat to generate catharsis? Is there some hidden triumph, some inner contrapuntal vision, which accompanies tragedy, which we sense but cannot reveal?

Ortega connects tragedy with the hero. The hero defies the status quo. Heroism, Ortega says, means "a constant tearing oneself away from that part of oneself which is given over to habit and is a prisoner of matter." The heroic act is an act of the will, and the hero is a man who wills to be himself—the self that is not yet born, but is determined to exist.

> The hero anticipates the future and appeals to it. . . . As something made to live in a future world, the ideal, when it is drawn back and frozen in the present, does not satisfy the most trivial functions of existence; and so people laugh. People watch the fall of the ideal bird as it flies over the vapor of stagnant water and they laugh. It is a useful laughter: for each hero whom it hits, it crushes a hundred frauds.
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> Consequently, comedy lives on tragedy as the novel does on the epic.

These words seem a clear statement of the psychodynamics of making a better world. It is true, as Ortega remarks, that "a host of plebeian instincts swarm around the rudimentary hero that we carry within us," and that "We do not demand justification from those who do not try to step off the beaten track, but we demand it peremptorily from the bold man who does."

These are, one might say, the elementary realities of the heroic life. Rudimentary heroes may begin to win some small victories when they can no longer be surprised or dismayed by the "normal" conditions of their enterprise.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

SIC ET NON

IT is impossible to write reviews and short articles about matters relating to education without discovering great differences of opinion in what is held to be interesting and important. There are those, for example, whose concern is aroused only by discussions of education in institutional terms. For them the school—more accurately the state-managed and directed public school—is hardly ever seen as anything but an instrument of political manipulation and psychological conditioning and control. No doubt public schools are subject to this criticism, but other things go on in the public schools, not all of them bad. The political frame of reference is not the only approach to the study of education, although it is one that ought not to be ignored.

Then there is the person-to-person educational equation, in which all other factors pale to insignificance. Here only the interchange between child and adult, or between child and child, makes the content. This is the teacher as catalyst, as Socratic provocateur, as quiet creator of situations favorable to discovery. Such a teacher uses any status quo as a field of raw materials; and if what is available seems barren, he tries to add to it, bringing in other materials he digs up, or by using his own imagination.

But what do you do when it seems that the psychological environment, and even the physical environment, is so prejudicial that learning is bound to be frustrated no matter what is attempted? Well, at this point you may desert education for politics, or try to do both at once; or you may get out of the public school system and start some kind of independent school; or you may participate in educational activities that do not involve a school; or even go on where you are, trying to create an oasis or two within the existing framework.

But apart from political obstacles, what would be the goal in terms of a changed educational institution—one in which a serious and devoted teacher would really want to work? In terms of the way people now talk, the goal would probably be to establish an environment for children in which each child would have full opportunity to realize as much of his being-possibilities as he can. Sometimes this idea is spelled out in ways of helping him to learn how to "cope" with the existing society (a project loaded with ambiguity), but as often free development and self-expression are thought of mostly in terms of some pastoral ideal, perhaps on the hypothesis that if enough of the young feel and think in this way, the appropriate social forms will somehow come into being. (Maybe they will; a lot of other change factors are at work these days.)

Underlying all conceptions of alternative education, however, is the intuitively grasped ideal of freedom. We all know what people mean when they say "freedom," even if none of us can give a satisfactory definition. Briefly, freedom means having choices and knowing and feeling that you have them. But people's ideas of a proper freedom range from very tough spartan conceptions to absolutely permissive circumstances. Yet we also know, if we think about it, that freedom has meaning only in a framework of limitation, and only in relation to goals that have not been reached. There would be no freedom (or absolute freedom, which is the same thing) in an empty universe. And we know that the child who encounters no obstacles cannot possibly learn anything at all. Growth is a phenomenon which results from overcoming obstacles. So, if you have a theory of freedom you also have to have a theory of obstacles; or, you have a theory of freedom in which certain sorts of obstacles are natural and acceptable, while others are not.

The ends of human beings change, or seem to; and the obstacles confronting them certainly change, too. It follows, then, that unless the idea

of freedom is kept very abstract, very philosophical, definitions of freedom must also change. This means that ideas about educating for freedom will have to change, too. And since changes of these several sorts don't seem to happen in or to people all at the same time, there are going to be various disagreements among them about both freedom and education.

So people try to get around these disagreements with the Utilitarian solution. We'll have to settle, they say, for the greatest good of the greatest number. That's the best we can do, and that makes it fair, doesn't it? But this is the rule of the majority, and democracy demands recognition of the rights of dissenters; so if we are going to stay democrats, we are going to have to have different sorts of schools. Who says what sort? Well, the parents will say what sort. But do the parents really know enough to make this decision? Maybe not, but is this a question for "experts" to decide? Shouldn't you stop interfering with people and what they believe they have a right to do and think? About education, just as about religion? Well, there are parts of this country where the federal government ought to step in and give the children an education good enough to get them out of their hereditary poverty and ignorance and malnutrition and hopelessness: *Isn't that true?* Well, there are also cities in this country where the parents are demanding local control; they know what they want for their children, and what they will do when they get the power to act for themselves about education, and who can say with any authority that these people are not within their rights? Self-determination is what our society, as a society, holds most sacred, isn't it?

So an observer might observe that until wisdom is joined with authority—or until politicians become philosophers (philosophers *can't* become politicians), we had better just bumble along in our ineffectual, democratic way.

There doesn't seem to be much that we can add to that.

But we can collect a few more remarks about freedom. There is this one, for example, from A. S. Neill's *Summerhill:* "For thirty-eight years, I have seen nasty, cheeky, hateful children come to the freedom of Summerhill. In every case, a gradual change took place. In time, these spoiled children have become happy, social, sincere, and friendly children." However, in an interview in *Redbook* (December, 1964) Neill also said:

> Look at those American Summerhill schools. I sent a letter to the *Greenwich Village Voice,* in New York, York, disclaiming any affiliation with any American school that calls itself a Summerhill school. It's one thing to use freedom. Quite another to use license. I haven't visited regular American schools, but more than half the young people now in my school are Americans. There is a difference between American children and English children. The Americans are more accustomed to license than freedom, I think. . . . At Summerhill we've had difficulties with American children coming over. They've read my book, you see. They say, "This is a free school; we'll do what we like." And when they find they're up against self-government and they can't do what they like, they object.

The next quotation is from Richard Llewellyn's *Man in a Mirror.* Speaking is an educated African who is also a tribal leader. He is reflecting on the difference between his tribe's ways and the teaching he had had from an Englishman:

> . . . the Masai intellect held not the least notion of physical science, no philosophy, or sense of ideas in the abstract, or any mathematical processes higher than the use of the hands and fingers. . . . Yet every tracker knew the value of sunlight in a dewdrop because the prism told where the track led and when it had been made . . . Mr. James had taught that sound politics led to a rich economy where people earned more money for less hours of work, and so created a condition of leisure needed by inventors, whether mental or physical. The Masai had always enjoyed an ample economy, if it meant a complete filling of needs, and after the animals were tended, there was plenty of leisure. Yet there were no inventors of any sort. There was a father-to-son and mouth-to-mouth passing of small items that pretended to be history, and a large fund of forest lore that might pass as learning, but there were no

> scholars, no artists, no craftsmen in the European sense.
>
> The effect was to lock a growing mind in a wide prison of physical action and disciplined restriction that by habit became accepted as absolute liberty.

In the current issue of *Our Generation* (Vol. 9, No. 3), one of the editors, James Hilborn, remarks:

> . . . the Soviets have made a society that is as bad as the capitalist one. In the economic sphere, both show the same disregard of the workers. Ellerman points out that, under state socialism, such as exists in Russia, "the workers, far from being self-managing producers, are essentially changed from being privately owned commodities rented on the labor market to being socially owned resources drafted into the industrial army."

One falters, then, in offering any but a highly individual account of an environment designed for education for freedom. The translation of subjective longing into objective circumstance does not seem to be a task well suited to collective enterprise.

FRONTIERS

"The Ability To Change"

A MUSING hopefulness characterizes René Dubos' essay in the *American Scholar* for the winter of 1973-74. As antidote to the widespread pessimism of the present, he recalls the anxieties of other epochs of transition, during which many found "reasons to believe that an era of darkness and perhaps of self-destruction might be at hand." Commenting, Dr. Dubos says:

> I now realize that the belief in an accelerated rate of change *is* largely an expression on our part of conceit or ignorance of history. It comes from the conceit that we are more adventurous and more inventive than our predecessors, and thus are creating situations for which there is no precedent. A simple cure of this conceit is to take a large dose of history. In my opinion, the truth is that time and time again in the past, the human condition has changed more drastically and more suddenly than we can expect it to change during the next one hundred years.

After giving various illustrations of such changes in the past—such as the coming between 1850 and 1900 of railroads, steamships, electricity, photography, the telephone, radio, and dozens of new technologies now taken for granted—he concludes with this encouragement: "I am impressed in particular by the ability of human beings and of whole civilizations to change the course of their social trends, to start on new ventures, and often to take advantage of apparently hopeless situations for developing entirely novel formulas of life."

It does not matter much if we think that Dr. Dubos somewhat underestimates the dimensions of present-day changes, since his chief point is the resilience of human beings and their capacity to make new beginnings. Of particular interest, then, are the agencies of conscious adaptation and change, since Dubos speaks of these only in general terms, referring, for example, to "the soul-searching now going on among scientists and technologists."

One such agency was the weekly magazine, *G.K.'s Weekly*, started in London in 1995 by G. K. Chesterton to spread the socio-economic ideas of Distributism. In January, 1937, three Americans, Herbert Agar, Ralph Borsodi, and Chard Smith began publishing *Free America,* with much the same ideals. Agar had spent some time in England as an editor of *G.K.'s Weekly*, and Borsodi had already published three books—*Flight from the City, The Distribution Age* and *This Ugly Civilization*—in which he developed a length both the material and the moral advantages in small-scale production, family or cottage industry, and homesteading as a healthful way of life.

One important factor in the ferment of ideas which led to starting the monthly, *Free America*, was the publication in 1936 of *Who Owns America?* by the "Tennessee Agrarians," a book which attacked the mess-production economics of the United States and proposed a philosophy of rural life. Allen Tate was a member of this group. These southern agrarians and others with the same views met twice during 1936, in Nashville and at Princeton, and drew up a statement of principles known as the Nashville Platform which declared for a wide distribution of power, of land, and economic production. It opposed mass production in agriculture and argued for efficiency in small production units "based on the latest developments of science." *Free America* was one of the expressions of this growing interest in distributist ideas, and the magazine was responsible for the term, "Decentralism," as a better name for the movement. *Free America* lasted for ten years, its contributors during this period making a roster of many of the most thoughtful Americans of the time. Besides Ralph Borsodi, whose work is well known, the writers included Arthur Morgan, Stringfellow Barr, Aldous Huxley, Peter van Dresser, Bert Fowler, Katherine Gauss Jackson, H. A. Highstone, and Ehrenfried Pfeiffer. Among the accomplishments of the magazine was the Productive Home Architectural Competition, in which architects

throughout the country participated, submitting drawings to deal with "a set problem outlining the needs of a typical family interested in producing the bulk of their own food on their own acreage." The exhibition of the winning drawings, held at Wanamaker's, was well attended.

While *Free America* started out with the objective of accumulating a body of decentralist doctrine "acceptable to all," differences of social philosophy made this impossible, so that the magazine became less a forum for doctrinal debate and more of a medium for describing practical decentralist activities in the United States and abroad. In an article in the last issue of *Free America* (Winter, 1946-47), J. P. Chamberlain recited its achievements, reporting the history on which we have drawn here, and recounting the changes in its editorial approach:

> Articles describing personal experiences in country living became an important part of its editorial makeup, along with some "how to" pieces.
>
> Since even the decentralist magazine itself has abandoned the attempt to work out a complete decentralist—or distributist—approach, does this show that decentralism is a failure? I do not think that it does. I believe rather that FREE AMERICA'S shift in editorial content shows a recognition that doctrinal discussions do not make for a readable magazine. The description of how decentralization of population and industry is working out in practice, how individuals and groups are solving for themselves the problems of rural living, is the field properly covered by a decentralist magazine which hopes to attract readers.

What happened to *Free America?* It was, Mr. Chamberlain suggests, "a war casualty." The dislocations of war weakened the movement, just as many other hopeful undertakings were diminished by the preoccupations with "military necessity" and the post-war moral confusion along with the "cold war." Yet the movement itself did not die, and enterprises like *Free America* now have fresh incarnation in various new magazines which are being published with renewed energy and vision. *Mother Earth News* is one of these papers, and there are a number of smaller publications with similar objectives. Peter van Dresser, who wrote many articles for *Free America*, is continuing the work he did in the 30s and 40s, transmitting the social intelligence of the past to the present and the future, and adding insights gained from his unbroken efforts in behalf of land-use reform. The magazine *Environment*, which began publishing in 1958, has added a strong scientific dimension to the criticism of industrial excesses in pollution and misuse of the land, and its news notes on constructive change in technology and conservation planning give ample evidence of the human capacity "to take advantage of apparently hopeless situations for developing entirely novel formulas of life."

Dr. Dubos' "optimism" has support in many areas, even if you have to look around some to see the evidence of its beginnings and spread.