

## THE SPACES OF FREEDOM

IT stands to reason that the voices of men who have come to distrust institutional ways of solving problems, yet preserve deep concern for the human values involved, will not be easy to hear in these days of blaring ideological polemics. A case in point is the work of Ignazio Silone, a writer who, as a reviewer in the London *Times Literary Supplement* puts it, "has never done what seemed the thing to do at that particular moment, but has followed his instinct and sure moral sense instead."

Silone is known in the United States mainly for his great trilogy of novels, *Fontamara*, *Bread and Wine*, and *The Seed Beneath the Snow*, and for his contribution to *The God That Failed*—in which, along with Arthur Koestler, André Gide, Stephen Spender, Richard Wright, and Louis Fischer, he gave his reasons for breaking with communism. Silone has always been far ahead of his times. As the London *Times* writer says, he recognized the evil of Fascism in its earliest days, and "in the late 1920's he broke with the Communist Party, having seen what Stalinism implied long before most of his contemporaries; in the 1930's he already knew, as Orwell was to know, the tyranny of the far left; in the post-war Marxist euphoria he was an odd man out, noticeably cold-shouldered on his return from exile to Italy—famous elsewhere, unknown or ill-considered at home."

The work under review in the *Times Literary Supplement* (for July 7) is a book just published in Florence which takes its title (in translation, *Emergency Exit*) from the essay included in *The God That Failed*. Of greater interest today is another essay, equally long, the name of which the reviewer renders as "New Thoughts on Progress," containing Silone's reflections on what has happened to the people who figure in his trilogy—the Italian peasants who were once so ground

down by poverty and Fascist oppression. Here the author's concern is with fundamental questions:

Italy is now a relatively prosperous country, many of the abuses he once saw have gone, and things on the face of it are incomparably better. Signor Silone wastes no time regretting the lost picturesqueness and has no sneers to make about television aerials and washing machines. What worries him is the spirit that seems inextricably linked with affluence: a spirit that is greedy and mean and unmanly and unneighborly, that relies on official help whenever anything goes wrong, that refuses to act unless paid for every action, that keeps up with the Joneses to what seems an hysterical degree.

As he faced what to some were unfaceable truths in the 1920's and 1930's, Silone now faces what the progressive liberal finds, perhaps, hardest of all to take: the paradox of material advance bringing spiritual retreat. The men he knew in his early political days were poor in money and leisure, yet they worked long hours for what they believed in: today, with leisure and money then undreamed of, even the boys who distribute political handbills in the street expect payment. Characteristically, after a survey full of gloomy examples, Silone refuses the easy comfort of disillusion: his final hope for the future of this materially cushioned society is tentatively mystical.

This groping for the issues behind the issues of the conformity/rebellion pattern produced by the requirements, and even routine arrangements, of the modern nation-state is the form now taken by all serious inquiry. Some years ago a Czechoslovakian sociologist visiting the United States mournfully asked his American colleagues how they dealt with the decline of idealism and commitment in youth. Young Czechs, he said, want only to sit around in cafes and listen to records by Louis Armstrong while drinking beer. When told of the revolutionary fervor of their fathers, they reject the reproach. Okay, they say, you won the revolution, and now we're going to

enjoy it; what's wrong with that? We can't keep our vision alive, the Czech sociologist complained. And he asked what American sociologists were doing about this problem. Someone may have given him *The Lonely Crowd* to read, as illustrating the kind of book we write about such matters, but he certainly got no answer. The situation is much as Czeslaw Milosz describes it in another context:

The resistance against the new set of values . . . survives but it is beaten whenever it has to explain itself in rational terms. A man's subconscious or not-quite-conscious life is richer than his vocabulary. His opposition to this new philosophy of life is much like a toothache. Not only can he not express the pain in words, but he cannot even tell you which tooth is aching.

Obsession with power and with the methods available through the political means may be our real trouble—what blinds us to the solutions we need to put to work. A basic distortion in the modern world view, a distortion enormously enforced by vast institutional arrangements conforming to it, may be what we have to correct before anything enduring or constructive can be accomplished. A first step may lie in continual recognition of the fact of the distortion, and unceasing review of the areas of life and decision which obsession by the political means has caused us to neglect. Observations by Gandhi some thirty and forty years ago reflect this basic outlook. Writing for *Young India* (and one other publication), he said:

If I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics encircle us today like the coil of a snake from which one cannot get out, no matter how much one tries. I wish therefore to wrestle with the snake. (1920)

My work of social reform was in no way less or subordinate to political work. The fact is, that when I saw that to a certain extent my social work would be impossible without political work, I took to the latter and only to the extent that it helped the former. I must therefore confess that work of social reform or self-purification of this nature is a hundred times dearer to me than what is called purely political work. (1931)

I look upon an increase in the power of the State with the greatest fear, because, although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying the individuality which lies at the root of progress. (*Modern Review*, 1935)

Some of these judgments are not difficult to confirm from a wider spectrum of historical experience. Toward the end of World War II, the *Christian Century* (for July 16, 1944) published an article by Hans Richter in which he described a young German friend called "Harro" who was a lieutenant in the *Luftwaffe*. By the outbreak of the war, Harro had begun to see the meaning of Germany's intentions and he wrote to his father:

"We are going to fight—for what? If Hitler wins, our Christian faith is dead. If he is defeated, universal pessimism will break us all. What do we fight for?"

Richter concludes the story of Harro:

But as a good German, trained in the tradition of Kant and Hegel, Harro did his duty, it never occurred to him to disobey the state. He had found that the Hitler regime involved the destruction of precisely those values he had finally come to cherish—but he felt it his duty to fight for his fatherland. Now Harro has died. With him the hope of a better Germany has faded a bit. He was just an ordinary student—but there are tens of thousands like him.

Obviously, Gandhi was right about the obliteration of the individuality of Harro, save for the fact that his conformity was the conformity of a broken heart. And Gandhi was right in another sense, in that the prosecution of the war by the Western Powers to the last agonizing moment of unconditional surrender took little or no account of the desperate resistance movement inside Germany—just as Dr. Goebbels predicted. Corporate political identities are all that nation-states will recognize in their relations with each other. States at war have an unseeing eye so far as individuals are concerned. Not until the Nuremberg Trials was there any recognition of "individual" moral reality.

Having come this far, and making these deductions from recent history, it is of obvious pertinence to ask: Well, is there *no* political order which is immune to this decline of individuality? The answer is that such immunity can exist only when there is the absence of political control of opinion and its free expression. And there is a direct relation between the exercise of political control of opinion and what people have come to *expect* of political power. If they expect all good to come from political power, sooner or later they will submit to total political control. What is not at all apparent, during this process of submission, is the fact that the root problem is *not* political, but grows out of a long-term politicalization of the non-political needs of human beings. Gandhi saw this, but his views and diagnoses can hardly become popular in a civilization where any separation between righteousness and coercive power is regarded as the ultimate folly.

In an article on the dangers of a linkage between power and righteousness (in the July *Progressive*), J. W. Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, warns against the decline of dissent in the United States. He describes the experience of an American poet, Ned O'Gorman, who recently visited Latin America under the sponsorship of the State Department. In preparation for his exposure to students and intellectuals in that part of the world, he had been instructed to explain that he was "unprepared" to discuss "difficult questions" bearing on the Dominican Republic and Vietnam. Sen. Fulbright tells what happened:

Poets, as we all know, are ungovernable people and Mr. O'Gorman proved no exception. He finally rebelled at a meeting with some Brazilian students with the following result as he described it: ". . . the questions came, swirling, battering, bellowing from the classroom. Outside the traffic and the oily electric heat. But I loved it. I was hell-bent for clarity. I knew they wanted straight answers and I gave them. I had been gorged to sickness with embassy prudence. The applause was loud and long. The embassy man [was] furious. 'You are taking money dishonestly,' he told me. 'If the government pays you to do this tour

you must defend it and not damn it.' It did no good when I explained to him that if I didn't do what I was doing, *then* I'd be taking the money dishonestly. . . ."

As O'Gorman put it, "I spoke with equal force of the glory and the tragedy of America. And that is what terrified the Americans." But why should anyone be terrified by a poet's free expression of opinion? We have said that this is not a political problem, and must now show that it is not. Let us go back to Harro, the tragic figure of Hans Richter's wartime article in the *Christian Century*. It "never occurred" to Harro "to disobey the state." It is as though he had said to himself, "If I cannot believe in the state, what then can I believe in?" and found no answer at all. So he did the "duty" that was left, fulfilling it with an emotion that can only be described as a sense of doom.

Where might Harro have obtained an alternative loyalty? Is this something that should have been *taught* to him? By whom? He had his moral sense, all right, but it was passive. Harro could suffer, but he could not act. No "emergency exit" from his intolerable situation was known to him.

Questions of this sort are complicated by the fact that basic psychological independence varies greatly from one individual to another, for no plainly apparent reason. What gives a man the sense of having a deep well of meaning in his own life? We appreciate and increasingly value the thought of Thoreau because of the *quality* of his moral independence, even though we encounter a very great mystery when it comes to explaining how he got it. Less famous men have it also; from what A. H. Maslow says in *Toward a Psychology of Being*, "self-actualizing" is a proper way of describing such individuals. How do you get a *society* of people like that?

The answer, of course, is "education," but what sort of education? This question must be asked insistently, since we have the habit of institutionalizing what we suppose to be solutions for our problems, overlooking the fact that every

institutional solution produces its own internal contradictions; this leads, in turn, to the development of "command and control" techniques which inevitably reduce the area of self-determined individual behavior—in short, politicalization. The problem, then, remains. It may be negatively described by saying that the evils of political authority are not effectively controlled by self-limiting political conceptions, since the positive demands of political organization always exceed any limit set by political philosophy. *Why shouldn't they*, when there is no alternative affirmative doctrine to the ever-growing claims of political action to be the only source of good? Power, in whatever name, does not speak to power except in terms of power. Yet this, we are beginning to learn, is a losing game.

How shall we raise up a generation of socially *responsible* individualists? This seems a more useful way of stating the problem. We have little need to identify our trouble, which has already become quite clear. What we must do is fill the void in the lives of human beings, to keep them from lapsing into either confident or tragically resigned conformity to the all-powerful state.

It is easy to see how we acquire our nostalgia for the days of the expanding frontier and for a free life along the margins of civilization. And it is easy to explain, in terms of basic human longing, the multiplication of precocious anarchists, single-minded rebels, and would-be Thoreaus who, having no Walden to retreat to, seek a less arduous translation in LSD.

The anarchists are surely precocious in the sense that any sudden attempt to deprive the Harros of this world of their all too solid State and its suffocating "security" can only frighten them, turning what wondering doubts they may be developing into defensive hostility or preventive aggression. Self-reliant human beings—and anarchists remain only slogan-mouthers if they are not that—are *grown*, not suddenly produced by one grand, reductive act of revolution. Free men

are developed by the slow process of internalizing the controls which once were external—by replacing the dull averaging and managing operations of politics with the delicate balancings which individuals become capable of through years of trial and practice. Yet today we have, instead of a quiet, pedagogic scene for the nurture of independent souls, a race course filled with booby traps, an air filled with raucous, steam-callope injunctions to run, run, *run*, with half a dozen different directions in which to go, each one leading out of sight, and each a narrowing lane which claims to hem in the way to *Survival*. Survival is a modest enough hope for men whose only serious thoughts are concerned with possible avenues of flight.

Of course, there are always the few who seem to thrive on threat and the challenge of disaster, whose will to self-determination grows stronger with each deprivation, and whose search for human community becomes a luminous primary value set against the shadowed scene of institutional conformity and external control. It is in this hunger for community—for an association which is uncoerced, cooperative, spontaneous, equilibrated by awareness of the necessities of a common good, and made beautiful by the efflorescent taste of a hidden personal discipline—it is here that the unwritten definition of a higher moral authority must be discovered.

The "No" which the emergencies of intrusive political power continually require will never have sufficient strength to triumph, nor will it exercise persuasion over others, unless it is quite plainly the corollary of an actively lived and honored "yes." This is surely the very essence of human need in our time, from which all else that is good will flow.

And this very inaccessibility to any routine conceptualization of the idea of "search," and the differing terms of individual investigation, may prove the enduring, the incorruptible basis of what is sought.

An undefined content may gain substance from being cherished and worked over by those who can only *feel* what it is, while knowing in more certain terms what it is not. And out of such awareness there comes a further incarnation of the animating presence in all men who have lived such lives regardless of opposing circumstances, and made, thereby, more living room for others. It will not do, however, to ignore the substance of this *animating presence*, while drawing up a schedule of its apparent effects in human life. Socrates spoke of his *daemon*, and although the name is not important, the substantial reality behind the name must not be converted into an abstract behavior-pattern which we claim to admire. A man's egoity is *real*; no mere abstraction, it is the source of his vision, the stuff of his dignity, and the duration of his resolve. Though undefinable, it is an original, living presence, and neither the theologians nor the mechanistic scientists can be permitted to stick their proprietary labels on it. A man is a man unto himself, and not in virtue of any defining authority or designing political benefactor.

It is quite possible, however, to say just this to children in the schools. It is possible for human beings to tell one another, to confide in public and private, that while the rule of reason is an admirable and necessary thing, it cannot be used to make a "thing"—a definable "object"—of a man. It is reasonable to ask how Harro might have turned out if, as a child, he had been told to look for his own "animating presence," and to find out what he could about its meaning and intentions, instead of being taught doctrines which prevented him from even thinking about saying "No!" As a matter of fact, we know very little about what human beings are capable of until we invite them, without prejudice, to find out. "What was your face before your parents were born?" is by no means a ridiculous question. The potentialities of a child (or any man) are equally mysterious.

How do you get people to develop some really muscular convictions about this "mystery"—the mystery of themselves and of human potentiality? That is the great question. There is no answer in generally acceptable terms, one reason being that the arousal of interest in this idea comes at its own time to each individual, and can hardly be scheduled in a "curriculum." But by the same token, a curriculum which sees this awakening as the highest educational good would be a curriculum filled with openings into the free life of the mind; it would be at least *inviting* to spontaneous moments of discovery, and it would in consequence develop a form, substance, and structure which could only be spoken of as following from the activities and functions of free men. Fortunately, ideas of this sort are already in the air of independent educational enterprise. Perhaps the highest compliment that can be paid to any contemporary society is to point out that such beginnings can actually take place in the spaces which it keeps open between the formidable institutional formations of the age.

But doing such things in schools is not nearly enough. This is the germ of a program for universal adult self-education. Its subject-matter is the Rediscovery of Man.

## *REVIEW*

### THE NOBLE INSECURITY

IN an article in the *New York Times Magazine* for April 24, Lewis S. Feuer, professor of philosophy and social science at the University of California in Berkeley, describes the decline of academic philosophy in the United States since the days of William James. His main point is that vigor and originality in philosophical thinking seldom survive the bureaucratizing habits of academic learning, with the result that new reaches of thought are almost always the work of interlopers and mavericks, so far as the universities are concerned. This has been true for hundreds of years. "The great figures who founded modern philosophy were not academicians but men such as Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Locke and Hume—physicists, mathematicians, political scientists who had almost no connection with the universities." After noting that modern philosophy was very much the creation of the professors in German universities, men who were "ideological bureaucrats," and that its present form ("linguistic philosophy") is "essentially a training in disputation in the medieval tradition," Dr. Feuer comments:

When philosophy . . . becomes academic, the results are much the same as when art becomes academic. What great novel could have been written to satisfy a Ph.D. requirement in Creative Writing? Or what great painting could have been done to secure a degree in Creative Art? It is quite otherwise in the sciences where the methods and techniques of verification and experiment on the whole provide a common ground upon which almost all will meet.

When philosophy becomes academic, it tries to emulate the sciences, to employ methods and criteria which the profession in general will accept. The pressures in the universities to be "scientific" are now overwhelming. Therefore, academic philosophers look for some device which will seem to make their "discipline" as objective, scientific and examination-gradable as physics or mathematics. A generation ago mathematical logic was the favored device. Today, as this is being discarded, the study of ordinary language, a kind of descriptive lexicography, is taken as the examinable core of philosophy. Would a James, Kierkegaard or Nietzsche ever have been able to get his mature philosophical works accepted for a Ph.D. degree? Probably not.

How could philosophy be protected from this passion for safety in objective classification? The only suggestion Dr. Feuer offers is to let the departments of philosophy in the universities die out. Since genuine philosophical enterprise is not "examination-gradable," it should be left to the glancing blows of other men whose daring and intensities of interest—whatever their field—lead them to have something philosophical to say. Drawing on the experience of recent centuries, he summarizes such possibilities:

Though academic philosophy withers in the colleges and universities, philosophy itself cannot be suppressed. While our professional philosophers practice their respective nonphilosophies, the function of philosophy itself has been assumed by religious thinkers, historians, scientists, novelists. A historian or a physicist who within his own work has already demonstrated his scientific capacity will not labor under the compulsion to make his philosophy "scientific." The historian or physicist is far more likely to allow full range to his speculative imagination on ultimate questions. He does not have to repress his philosophical instinct as a defense-mechanism against his scientific colleagues.

Religious thinkers and novelists likewise have committed themselves to explore the nature of man without benefit of scientific orthodoxy.

A philosopher is a man whose love of truth will not suffer any bureaucratic "management" or disposition of ultimate questions. As soon as intellectual conventions come to rule the interpretations of meaning, he insists upon going behind them. And all men, be it said, are or ought to be philosophers in this sense. It was *right*, for example, for the American reporters to be shocked when, during World War II, a member of the British Cabinet, in reply to a question about what Britain was "fighting for," said that he could supply a list of "platitudes," but what would they really mean? A world where empty conventions take the place of principles is not a fit world for human beings.

In an article in the *Texas Quarterly* (Winter, 1965), Klaus Mehnert, who teaches political science at the Institute of Technology at Aachen, describes the intellectual turbulence and questioning beneath the bureaucratic surface of life in Soviet Russia. The

poets, at considerable personal risk, are leading the way. Of the means of the circulation of dangerous or "forbidden" ideas in present-day Russia, Prof. Mehnert writes:

In totalitarian states, people develop a kind of "sixth sense" for registering and understanding the "signals" of the intellectuals; they have learned how "to read not the black but the white"—*i.e.* between the lines. More than that: they are eager to get hold of ideas which have not even found a "black" frame, which have not yet been printed. In a recent copy of a Soviet literary journal, this request for the unprinted is described:

"Don't talk to me about literature! If there is a person who knows contemporary literature, it is me. Journals? Periodicals? That's all nonsense! What they print officially, I don't even read. What good would it do? My friends obtain literature for me in the form of typewritten notebooks. Those are truly creations, full of glamor! ... And not only notebooks. . . . Sometimes they put such poems on tapes!"

Prof. Mehnert tells a revealing story:

Some time ago, a Russian visited me in my home. I did not know him, but he had heard that I was interested in his country and that I spoke his language. He was an engineer, in his late thirties, who had attended one of the German technological fairs and was about to return to his homeland. "What is on your mind?" I asked him after we had settled down.

"Well," he said, "I have a whole lot of questions. But I shall start with the most important one—what is the meaning of life?"

I showed my surprise. "You, a Russian Communist, ask *me* about the meaning of life? Have you not been told by your teachers, youth leaders, Komosomol and Party lecturers ever since you can remember what—according to the Communist view life's meaning is?"

"Of course," he shrugged, "all that I know by heart. But I want to know the *real* meaning of life."

Prof. Mehnert gives some account of the events which have helped Soviet people to revive the great philosophical questions:

The Russian intellectuals have also rediscovered conscience which, under Stalin, had disappeared from sight. The truth was all his—or the Party's. If your conscience told you differently, you'd better discard it

and chase it into the farthest corner of your brain, out of harm's way. But now the Russians find out that Stalin was wrong and their conscience was right! Then the conscience is a more reliable guide in life than the Party? Every new Soviet novel about Stalin's concentration camps in Siberia enforces the doubts about the Party's wisdom and strengthens the case for the superiority of one's conscience.

This recalls Harold Rosenberg's view (in *The Tradition of the New*) that when Khrushchev exposed Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Party Congress, he gave the people back their minds and souls. As long as Stalin, the supreme bureaucrat, remained in power, a life of imitation and conformity could be plainly defined. Not so after Stalin fell, for then there remained only the ideal of Lenin, a man cast in a heroic mold; no one could imitate him! So the people were thrown back on themselves.

In the West, Prof. Feuer thinks, there has been a subtler liberation and return to philosophy. Describing changes in outlook since World War II, he writes:

. . . the basis on which a whole generation finally rejected Marxism and pragmatism was in terms of the false character which they imparted both to one's emotions and beliefs. The all-sufficing social dedication, when one looked deeply within oneself, turned out to be a repressed, partially sublimated religious feeling. When one realized that ideological causes were attempts at a secular equivalent of religious experience, old abandoned beliefs began to return in a chastened, simpler form—the belief, for instance, in human freedom in more than a political, social or psychological sense. Are there any methods in philosophy other than being most honest with oneself concerning one's spontaneous, uncoerced beliefs? And don't we reject doctrines finally because we feel behind the façade of pedantic profession a certain dishonesty?

It seems that various historical and social factors now conspire to awaken an interest in philosophy as an independent quest for meaning. And there is little likelihood that people so led to serious questioning will ever again accept the "answers" made available by either academicians or political or religious bureaucrats or clerks.

**COMMENTARY**  
**DIAGNOSIS, FOLLOWED BY . . .**

HARDLY anything can be added to what Mr. Friedenberg says in his new (1964) Preface to *The Vanishing Adolescent*. It is all so right and crystal-clear.

The solution for the difficulties he describes is at once enormously simple and endlessly difficult. It is a part of what is everywhere needed to make our society fit for human beings. It comes down to seeing how we have vulgarized the points of contact among both young and old, to the extent of producing a vast host of ills which we do not understand and which we strive against by every means except the right ones. The change must come first in individuals, who may then be able to create institutions that will serve instead of mutilating human beings. Following is a section of Mr. Friedenberg's Preface for which space was lacking in the "Children" department:

. . . *The Vanishing Adolescent* pictures the young in a gallant, if hopeless struggle with the timidity and corruption of the adult world, usually in the person of school officials; and it would have been more accurate to picture American youth rather as already implicated in the deeds and values of their culture. Mostly they go along with it and sincerely believe that in doing so they are putting down troublemakers and serving the best interests of their community. They accept, by and large, the society they live in; its rewards are the rewards they seek; its sanctions are the sanctions they fear. The school is a specialized instrument for dealing with the young, and therefore the place where their socialization is accelerated—but it is, on the whole, neither better nor worse than the rest of society and its students, fortunately for it, cannot really imagine that it might be different.

Our problem is not conformity. There may indeed be too little of that. If the world is a jungle, then obviously one must dress for dinner in it, if only out of respect for the memory of the neighbor who is to be served as the main course.

The difficulty is that we have only norms to conform to, rather than standards. Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which is a cornerstone of modern physics, tells us, in effect, that in order to know where anything is we must make observations on it that inevitably interfere with its trajectory; and it is only our trajectory that we worry about; we couldn't care less where, who, or what we are now. Basically, we do not even *want* a community; for people like *us*, motels are just about right. The high school is a kind of motel, though less well-appointed than it might be.

# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### TOWARD AN UN-MANAGERIAL REVOLUTION

[We print here, by permission, portions of Edgar Z. Friedenberg's Preface to the 1964 edition of his book, *The Vanishing Adolescent*, published by the Beacon Press, copyrights 1959 and 1964.]

THE VANISHING ADOLESCENT is, among other things, a love story; and whatever one may do with love stories it is generally unwise to edit them seven years later. I knew, of course, how I felt and still feel, about adolescents. But I did not know how specialized and solipsistic my awareness of them had become. I do not myself believe that one can learn anything important about anything except by loving—or possibly hating—it: without strong feeling there is simply not enough empathy available to transcend the barrier between one's own existential state and any other. But this is only one kind of knowledge, and in the age of science not a kind that is held in much esteem; we call it subjective and dismiss it as useless for purposes of external manipulation and control.

*The Vanishing Adolescent* is, I hope, utterly valueless as a tool for handling "teen-agers"; in fact, it is designed to break off in the administrator's hand. This has, I am sure, made it disappointing to readers who had hoped to use it as a guide in solving the problems of youth, and who sometimes complain to me that I do not tell them what to do about the conditions I discuss. But adolescents are not a problem to me, and I cannot write about them as if they were. I regard them as I do love and death, which are not problems, though they leave problems in their wake. Adolescents both comfort and terrify me by their very nature and existence. I once described to an acquaintance what I had seen at a large track meet, especially during the time *between* events when an endless procession of tall, calm-looking boys in snug, glowing warm-up suits

jog or lope around the track in pride and self-absorption, singly or in twos and threes, or lie in the infield resting for their event, aloof and immanent. When I paused, he wanted to know who had won. If I had told him that I had just heard the Budapest Quartet playing Mozart, I suppose he might have asked the same thing.

When I wrote *The Vanishing Adolescent*, I had known only those adolescents who had permitted me to become their friend through the previous twenty-five years since my own adolescence began. This is really not as biased a sample as one might expect considering the opportunities it presents for unconscious selection and self-selection. Most adults treat adolescents more like things than people, and anyone who does not and who has some affection and respect for them is likely to be accepted. I don't know that most youngsters like me, but my presence makes it easier for them to like themselves, and this is enough to keep the relationship going. So I had got fairly close to hundreds of young men and women; but the very fact that my relationships to them had all become personal meant that what I knew about them was very much colored by my own needs and point of view. Still, I did know what they must be in order to make me feel about them as I did, and that is the main pillar on which *The Vanishing Adolescent* rests.

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I had no adequate idea of the detailed physical intrusiveness and vulgarity of the high school. I knew it was constrictive but didn't know it was so presumptuous: the corridor-passes, the wrangling over smoking, the dress regulations, the ill-tempered, belligerent little men and enormous, aggrieved women detached from their teaching duties to scream at students in the corridors and the cafeteria for, quite literally, "getting out of line." It is the *details* that matter and these one cannot possibly imagine till one has seen them: the librarians who refuse to admit a student to the library unless he is wearing a belt; the youngsters crouched in the corridor like see-no-evil monkeys

during compulsory Civil Defense drills; the blatting jocularity and pompous patriotism that comes over the public address system into every corner. I had also not grasped the fact that students have no refuge or surcease from it; being used to colleges and college schedules, it just didn't occur to me that high school students have no unscheduled time whatever during the school day and cannot even go to the library to study except during library period without a special pass; that they have no club room of their own or any place where they can get off and be themselves. The whole experience of secondary education, I came to realize, is set up in such a way as to insure that individual adolescents will become alienated from their own inner-life; they are given no opportunity to examine it, and are punished if they permit it to direct their actions. The high school is generally even more Orwellian than my vision of it had been; and, as with Orwell, it is the little things, the endless specifics, each petty in itself, that really make up the effect. Nineteen-sixty-four? We are certainly running well ahead of schedule.

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I now believe that this is the inevitable price of an open society if it uses its schools—and all open societies do—primarily to equalize social and economic opportunity among individuals from widely disparate social groups. The school cannot, under these conditions, nurture warmth, intimacy, or deeply felt commitments between individuals. People whose backgrounds are very different can, and of course do, come to mean very much to one another, and enrich one another's lives; but this happens only when they are working together on something that has significance and poignancy for them. It does not happen when they are blandly striving against each other for a favorable position in transit, or going through the forms of democratic ritual in order to assure a school district that it is a community, when it is really nothing but the residue of some thousands of inhabitants' poorly realized and conflicting ambitions.

Therefore, it seems to me that the tone of my comments about the schools is too harsh, even though the schools are even worse than I thought. The whole society is worse than I thought; and it is bad for more fundamental reasons and reasons that are merely the obverse of its most highly prized values. The fact is that we are not a freedom-loving people; one would think that dignity and privacy meant nothing to us, except that our zeal in denying them to our neighbors suggests that we do at least fear them. Americans, of course, are heterogeneous, though much less so than our numbers and diversity of origin would lead anyone to expect. But by and large, we are a nation of empiricists, which sounds better than what it turns out to mean: a mixed lot of sly, manipulative, anxious people deeply threatened by the vicissitudes of an absurd, dangerous, and rather contemptible economic system that they dare not challenge for fear of what their dissent will do to their future chances. As individuals, of course, most of us are a lot better than that: genuinely decent, kind-hearted, public-spirited, and generous of impulse. But these qualities don't count for very much when the actions to which they might lead are certain to be killed in committee somewhere between conception and delivery. Tolerance and generosity among us have become what we call a posture; they are the greasy-kid-stuff with which we slick down the fundamental hard-headedness—or bone-headedness—of our policy decisions, private and public.

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What I have noticed—and far more frequently than I thought when I wrote *The Vanishing Adolescent*—is young people who, having no concept of fixed stars, have also no gift for navigation. Nor—and this is their grace and their tragedy—will they stay on the beam; they are sensitive and rightly distrust from the depth of their hearts the jolly establishment that transmits it; no love—and well they know it—inspires these nocturnal emissions. They fly blind, by the seat of their jeans that the high school forbids them to

wear, and slip in an instant from positions of apparent stability into grotesque and dangerous patterns that could not, in any case, get them anywhere. Adults cannot tell where they are with them; but, then, they seldom are with them. It is a terrifying journey, and at the destination there is no visibility.

I have never been on it; I have not the courage to go, and am too old to be welcome. What I know about it comes from having run, for just thirty years, the lunch-room at one of the places they can sometimes touch down. We are integrated, the food is good, and we cannot afford much fog. Since *The Vanishing Adolescent* was published I have been moved to find that they sometimes carry it with them. Not as a working chart; for that purpose, like most charts, it was obsolete before it was printed. What youngsters like most about it, I believe, is the quaintly fanciful depiction of terrain they are more familiar with, and the deadly accuracy of the portions of it that are simply endorsed: "Here be dragons!"

EDGAR Z. FRIEDENBERG

## *FRONTIERS* Teilhard's "Noosphere"

THE impact of Teilhard de Chardin's books may eventually resemble to some degree what happened, over the years, as a result of the work of Anton Mesmer. Within a century of Mesmer's death, despite the fact that the French Academy rejected his theories, dozens of volumes incorporating the dynamics of Mesmer's doctrines had been published. Many of his ideas were carried throughout the Western world by students of his writings, and by "healers" of various descriptions, it being possible to trace such nineteenth-century developments as Christian Science, New Thought, and other heterodox groups to roots in Mesmer's influence, along with other sources. Histories of magic and the supernatural were written with serious effort at scientific explanation, in the light of Mesmer's ideas, and one thorough German scholar, Hecker, produced a study of the Black Plague and other medieval epidemics and "manias," attempting to show how these might be explained in terms of Mesmer's teaching of Animal Magnetism. Actually, there were interesting correlations between Mesmer's views and the intuitions of thoughtful persons who experienced these disasters.

The present, like the time of Mesmer in the last half of the eighteenth century, is a period of revolutionary turbulence and longing for synthesis. Idea-systems are breaking up today, as they did then, and the hunger for philosophic meaning is even more acute than in those days of the Enlightenment. Small wonder, then, that the books of Teilhard de Chardin achieved an almost immediate popularity. In addition, their entry into the world of thought was smoothed by an eminent scientific colleague, Julian Huxley, and their appeal made almost "romantic" by the suppressions practiced against this author by the religious institution to which Teilhard belonged. It is already clear that his writings have given hope and strength to unnumbered individuals in all

branches of thought for whom the sterile, mechanistic universe of nineteenth-century science has seemed more like a mindless isolation ward than a home for living, loving, and aspiring human beings.

Teilhard's work embodies a vast enthusiasm, and while, in the opening words of *The Phenomenon of Man*, he tells the reader it is to be examined as "purely and simply a scientific treatise," the book remains a flight of the imagination. Yet there is this question: On what grounds do we deny works of the imagination a scientific character? For all we know, the very ground we walk on, the air we breathe, and the structured universe in which we live are works of the imagination. Both the fixities we rely upon and the movements on which we hitch rides may be forms of the action and repose of forces which have their root in some aspect of a universal mind—some *anima mundi* of which we, in our moments of highest awareness, become the conscious expression. It would be an evident folly to require the phenomenon of life to conform to the rules of the dead or inanimate, since the phenomenon of man obtains our attention through our capacity to imagine a place for human beings in the order of nature. The "reality" of man may well be found in the substance of thought—and thought in action is precisely *imagination*.

A paper by Henrik Infield, published in the October, 1965, issue of the *Israel Annals of Psychiatry and Related Disciplines*, is devoted to exploring the possibility of further scientific application of Teilhard's ideas. Prof. Infield begins by setting forth the main thrust of the French scientist's conceptions:

True to his basic approach, which he calls "hyper-physical"—as marked off from metaphysical—Teilhard starts from the "primary observable fact" of the Universe, which is matter. This immediately raises the old, and so far unsolved issue of the emergence of mind from matter. The solution Teilhard proposes, if not altogether new, is simple and ingenious. More spirited than Santayana—who views spirit merely as a "potentiality" of matter—Teilhard argues that

consciousness which he uses interchangeably with thought and spirit from the beginning is enclosed in matter. Originally so diffused that it remains virtually invisible, it becomes more and more observable with the progress in evolution, until it reaches its full manifestation in man.

This view has the effect of transforming the meaning of evolution:

Seen as a progressive accumulation of mental energy and a corresponding "growth and deepening of consciousness," evolution thus becomes essentially the evolution of thought. It is its genesis, therefore, which lends meaning not only to the past and present of evolution but, what is more important to its future. Thought, as Teilhard sees it, obeys the laws of thermodynamics, but it does so only up to a certain point. What happens beyond this point depends upon our understanding of the nature of thought, which as yet is quite scant. Indicative of its complexity are the pertinent questions raised by another student of the phenomenon of man, Teilhard's compatriot, Alexis Carrel. Speaking of Thought in his *Man the Unknown* (1935) he asks: "What is thought, that strange being, which lives in the depths of ourselves without consuming a measurable amount of chemical energy? Is it related to known forms of energy? Could it be a constituent of our universe, ignored by the physicists, but infinitely more important than light? . . . Does it consist of a kind of energy differing from that studied by physics, expressing itself by other laws, and generated by the cells of the cerebral cortex?" These questions cover a complex of issues the unravelling of which will involve long-range research estimated by Carrel to require several generations. The only fact which Carrel claims to have experimentally verified is that "metabolism is not modified by intellectual work." Or, as Teilhard formulates it: "There is no chance of ever finding a 'mechanical equivalent' for Will or Thought."

The really influential concept introduced by Teilhard is the idea of the Noosphere, which is a kind of psychological fluid medium surrounding the world—created, added to, and characterized by man's thought. While by no means alien to ancient cosmologies, this conception involves radical revision of all mechanistic assumptions:

As thought is specific to man, so the noosphere is specific to our planet which, with the formation of this sphere, enters a new age. With it, Teilhard claims, "The earth gets a new skin. Better still, it

finds its soul." A Martian, if we can imagine him as capable of analyzing not only the physical but also the mental exhalations emanating from our earth at this moment, would notice, Teilhard fancies, as a first characteristic of our planet, "not the blue of the seas or the green of the forests, but the phosphorescence of thought."

As a social scientist who has given much of his life to the study of community relationships, Prof. Infield draws out the possibilities of this conception as it might be applied to socio-cultural phenomena:

Enriching the noosphere, noetic concentration [creative ideation of the sort investigated and described by Jacques Hadamard] in turn is facilitated by it. If this reciprocal relation followed a progressive, straight line of development we should today be much more capable of such concentration and, consequently, of achieving a higher degree of the glowing intensity of ideas than our ancestors. Unfortunately, the evolution, here, too, appears to proceed in devious ways. The noosphere too seems to have its seasons and its fluctuations, its ebbs and tides, its partial and total eclipses, its clouds and blackouts. For all we know, what is called in German *Zeitgeist*, the mental atmosphere of a given epoch, may be in some ways due to changes in the noosphere. It may be these changes which, if they do not determine, at least facilitate the flowering of such glowing epochs of mental creativity as that of Akhnaton in Egypt, of the Hebrew Prophets, the period of Pericles and of the Renaissance; or, in contrast, of such epochs of obscurantism as that of the "dark ages," of the Inquisition, witchhunting, persecution manias and pogroms, and the long periods of mental blackouts like the one from which we are still trying to recover. What still is missing, but what it seems we are in dire need of, is even the beginning of systematic study of these fluctuations. As Teilhard observes, "We have as yet no idea of the possible magnitude of noospheric effects."

Of the significance of this view for the understanding of history, Prof. Infield says:

. . . this kind of explanation does not seek to substitute noosphere for God or some other inscrutable power on which to put the blame. The doctrine of "noosphere effects" is based on the assumption that the noetic energy engendered by man does not simply evaporate, but forms a layer of mental accumulations which emits noetic rays that in turn

affect the thoughts and consequently the actions of men. . . . If this be so, then the prevention of such catastrophes as the one under the consequences of which we still suffer depends upon whether it is possible for man to learn to control his thoughts so as to direct them toward constructive instead of destructive goals; and if so, in what way.

The implications of this reading of Teilhard de Chardin's work are far-reaching. They could easily become the basis of a "naturalistic" view of moral law—which is, to express it simply, a conception of natural order in which the thoughts and actions of men bear the burden of final responsibility. Ethical principles gain something like a scientific grounding from such a view.