

## CONCERNING A DIALOGUE

I THINK I ought to adhere to certain principles, in attempting a dialogue. Whether or not my partner be Buddhist, I ask him to accept the same point of view, the same intellectual and moral standard, in order to exchange ideas—in order to have a dialogue. First of all, to make communication possible, we should agree to these principles, for then the dialogue will afford friendly and open-minded exchange of views and ideas, excluding whims of prejudice and misunderstandings due to the nature of language.

Let's see! What I'm going to say—so you may think—is bound to have a Buddhistic intellectual content; how can the author deny that he is a Buddhist? And you may assume that I am going to talk about the blessings of Buddhism; after all, why should I do the opposite?

Such action on my part could only result in tiring my listeners—perhaps more, in repelling them. Quite possibly, you will be tempted to say, when I start talking: "Oh my, the same old story once more. . . . We already know what you are going to tell us: Buddhism is everything, the rest nothing! Isn't that it? No moral communion is possible between us; don't try to charm us. Dialogue is possible only between two souls free of all prejudice, of all preconceived ideas. Are you going to pretend you are free—you, who are a Buddhist? Don't think other people are all that naïve!

The friend—or listener—who has such thoughts about me is right; that is, I won't contradict him. But, in my place, would you not do the same thing? It would be silly to pretend to be different from anybody else humanly speaking. These are everyday banalities; humanly, we all resemble one another. But how tiresome—all these endlessly repeated actions, of the body as

well as of the mind, of whatever origin, whatever aim. . . .

Yet if we allow these banalities to dishearten us, we have not tried hard enough to overcome ourselves. In the Buddhistic language of the *Vijnaptimatratā*, we call these attitudes *Vikalpa*—derived from the consciousness which is ruled by the principle of isolated identity of things and beings. Things and beings are not immutable, nor do they have a constant nature: a billionth of a second later, it is neither the same being nor the same thing any more.

Take an example. One day, somebody approached me and asked casually: "Say, you are a Buddhist?" I nodded. He looked at me for a few moments, then showed by a certain head movement that he already had understood something—something about me, of course. We said good-bye. But I wasn't satisfied; the incident somehow haunted me. He had understood something—but *what?* In his mind, there must have taken place some kind of synthesis: a certain number of ideas, certain mental images must have emerged and combined to create an impression of what Buddhism in general, and then my Buddhism, is like. And it is a 1000 to one that the mental picture of Buddhism he created for himself had no similarity to my own conception—because, from the moment I put on my Buddhist robe, it has been my own. I might go so far as to say that there must be as many of these mental images as there are human brains. Contours, nuances, and dimensions—they would all differ from each other according to individual moral and intellectual character and vary also with objective social and historical circumstances. And obviously, Buddhism *in itself* ought to be something, somewhere, too. . . . Plainly, we cannot know the degree of interdependence between this Buddhism *in itself* and our individual version. This

ignorance is one of the logical consequences of our particular personal consciousness, very dense, so to speak, and implacable. . . .

Each of us is tempted to think that his Buddhism reflects faithfully and integrally Buddhism *in itself*: this is the greatest error the human intellect can commit. While there are so-called "Buddhistic" attitudes of consciousness, these have nothing to do with Buddhism strictly speaking—with Buddhism *in itself*.

How is it possible for me to judge in this way, since I am deeply convinced that every human individual bears within him the burden of this dense kind of subjectivity in every thought and act of judgment? And where do I gain the right to assume that my attitude of consciousness is the only correct one,—the one most clearly derived from orthodox Buddhism?

First let me assure you that I do *not* assume my Buddhism is the "true" Buddhism. I am sure of only one thing: the more I develop in the course of time in my knowledge of Buddhism, the less naïve I will become—and by that I mean that I will get closer and closer to Buddhism *in itself*.

I must get out of this vicious circle. Returning to that stranger I mentioned a moment ago—the one who approached me—it is quite possible that, having had a certain impression of my Buddhism, he might say of me to himself: "There you are—another human being on the road to Nirvana! One more man who wants to get rid of his *self* in order to avoid the six stages of transmigration!"

Actually, the language and its conceptual and idea contents vary with the individual kind of consciousness; using the same words, everyone follows the movement and the orientation of his own ideas—even though they may be quite different. In other words, everybody gives to the words the sense he prefers. Nirvana, Nothingness, the I, Transmigration—these words do not have the same meaning for everybody. Nirvana has so many different meanings that

humanity is unable to define it. There have been countless efforts to do what the Great Sakya-Mouni himself ignores. When asked what Nirvana means, he refused to answer—that is, he did not define the word.

If my friend reveals to me his idea of my Buddhism, I must ask him in return what he means by "my wish to get to Nirvana and to efface my self in order to escape the laws of transmigration"? While he would doubtless explain his words according to his view of Buddhism, I should make great effort to understand his viewpoint. I might say to him: "I am just a Buddhist, it's only a question of my own personal Buddhism, not of yours, since we are looking at things in a different way. What you call Buddhism isn't really 'one'—not a 'one' every Buddhist has. It's rather the idea—your own idea—of what you think Buddhism is." But then, he could turn this logic against me by asking: "Are you sure that yours is the right one?" So neither one knows which of us is right, which one of the two Buddisms is the better, or how they relate to Buddhism-in-itself.

There are about 500 million Buddhists, making that many viewpoints, that many Buddhistic doctrines all assuming to be the orthodox one. Add to this list the educated people, writers and men of letters who study Buddhism according to their lights and possibilities—as well as all those who have only heard about Buddhism—all of them may think they know what Buddhism means. But in reality these are only isolated conceptions of Buddhism, whatever their number, having nothing to do with what might be termed "ideal" Buddhism. In a religion containing dozens of sects and philosophical and religious systems, it is no easy job to determine in what Buddhism-in-itself consists. Therefore, it should be no surprise to learn that Buddhism in itself is said to comprise about 84,000 different interpretations—in other words, 84,000 different ways to achieve Truth.

Allow me to elaborate a little before setting down a first principle. The great theologian Paul Tillich, in his *Systematic Theology*, speaks of a *theological circle*. If we hope to reach the One Absolute Truth, we have to install ourselves inside the circle—not outside. By "inside" Tillich means the region of all those who count themselves among those religious people for whom the Bible and the Church are the Great Way through which to approach Revelation—in other words, all those who call the religion of Jesus Christ their own. The "outside," by contrast, is the region of those to whom the notions of Revelation and Faith remain strange. If these wish to enter the circle, they have to have the courage for the necessary jump.

Yet there are difficulties. Lots of people call themselves Christians, but if you look at them closely you wouldn't think that they all belong inside the circle. The same phenomenon can be observed in other religions. And by virtue of what law can we forbid false "religious" people to wear the exterior signs of authenticity? The authority of the Church weighs very heavily. But as to differentiating between those inside the circle and those *outside*, the Church is revealed to be powerless, quite evidently and quite normally. Regardless of external classifications, there are as many Christian viewpoints as there are Christians; and which one of all these can claim to envisage the One and Absolute Truth, the only correct one—and enjoy the authority to establish the map called theological circle, with all its logical justifications of the borderline separating inside from outside?

For us, no religious person, whatever the religion to which he belongs, can dare to affirm explicitly that he is inside the circle. Of course, I am speaking of those who care for justice and good sense, excluding "false believers." For us, faith is not a ready-made article—produced by a kind of industrial manufacture—but rather a strong willingness to search restlessly, to deny any kind of absolute value to whatever one acquires,

to go on learning and to admit new solutions, to continue *moral and spiritual experimentation*. To have faith does not mean to accept as definitive any previously discovered ideas, but to experience a continually alternating rhythm of creation and denial—which demands, if you want to undertake it, great moral courage in enduring, doubting, and suffering.

Western theologians of today speak of Faith as of a divine Grace—but of free choice of the individual in relation to the Church and the Scripture. Under these circumstances, who can pretend to know those who have faith from those who don't, or those who have obtained the Grace of God from those to whom it is refused? If we speak of *ourselves*—who are of course inside the circle!—are we really sure of the authenticity of Divine Grace? Or might what we call Divine Grace be only the result of certain subjective mental operations?

There are people in life who know nothing about the church, nothing about the Bible, but whose behavior is profoundly consistent with the moral decrees of Christianity. I think that these people, without being inside the circle, can claim to be counted among the authentic Christians.

For this reason all the linguistic, intellectual, and other differentiations—all this inside, outside, this way, that way, here-and-there distinctions—are nothing but so many obstacles impeding communication between human beings. And in order to have a dialogue in this world of such diversity of people, we have to pierce this "armor," this "iron-plating," the result of human assumption and prejudice.

This friend whom I mentioned, who said that I am not free any more, was doubtlessly alluding to this "carapace," this turtle shell of individual opinion which makes our brains impervious to intellectual contributions from other parts of the world. But then, another friend may wonder: Do we, in this case, have to refuse to follow *any* religion, to accept any kind of doctrine, in order to be free?

It must be asked, does anyone really succeed in living like that, wholly without alliances or views of any sort? He who is neither Christian nor Buddhist—can he claim to be *free*? Quite possibly, instead, his "armor," his "carapace"—allow me this imagery—is if anything getting thicker and thicker. And the result may be that he, having refused the hazard and challenge of intellectual decision, becomes slave to a kind of prejudice worse than the prejudices common to the majority of human beings. So it is surely better to accept, to welcome, a "*prajnapiti*"—a road on which to move forward with the best part of oneself; and to bring to it one's whole soul, ready for the painful search after Truth; and ready, too, to engage in a dialogue with other people on the other side of the psychological barricade—and also with oneself; and ready, finally, to change in order to realize oneself, even choosing to suffer of one's own free will.

With such an intellectual attitude, we may ultimately be freed from all prejudices, from all obstacles, from all coercive authority of whatever kind—rejecting any impulse of dangerous fanaticism. In this way, whatever point of view we choose, we are together with the others, and we are also the ones in front of the others, who face the others, ready for a constructive and fruitful dialogue.

The first principle I want to set down, then, is the need to get rid of our prejudices, of our preconceived ideas, in order to start on the way of Truth. To whatever religion, to whatever moral or philosophical system we subscribe, we have to conform to this principle—call it Emancipation.

The second principle I propose is to refuse confrontation of an intellectual kind between religions and philosophical systems, in the sense of establishing value judgments in order to extract some kind of exclusiveness or private self-justification. If there is confrontation, it ought to be only in order to explain our ideas and to expose them for study.

So the problem is not to know which religion is the right one, which is the one to be propagated, while all the others should be discouraged. The most pressing need for us is to find out:

- (1) What are the characteristics of such and such a religion?
- (2) In what sense is this or that religion useful?
- (3) How does this or that religion make itself useful?
- (4) What is our basis for proving that our statements are well-founded?

With these questions we are able to avoid "discussing" for all eternity—leading to nothing but loss of time and failure of effort.

It remains for me to state the third principle. One can try to understand the depths and the intellectual scope of a religion through different "gates": theology, philosophy, psychology, history, economy, politics, ethnography, sociology—there are many instruments permitting access to the understanding of a religion. Every "gate" in its turn opens other avenues helpful to our intention to grasp the meaning of facts which may have escaped our attention when we tried to enter by other "gates." It is only that our discoveries, while granting their importance, should never keep us from looking further, in the sense that other people's discoveries, too, have their importance—considering the relativity of value judgments. We should not try to explain everything with our newly acquired knowledge; otherwise we'd be like the blind people attempting to describe an elephant.

Many learned and wise men have tried to give a precise account of the origin of religions: for Max Mueller, they arise out of the personification of things and animals, and originally manifested, in the dark past, in the human act called *cult* and through elaborate myths; for Spencer, the fear of nature's forces produced the cult of souls, starting

with the ancestor cult and ending with the cult of souls capable of glorious deeds; for Van Gennep or for Crawley, religion grows out of birth-giving, puberty, marriage, death—the factors causing moral crises leading to cults and the ritual manifestations which we call *religious*. Then, with Freud, a whole new horizon opens up: religion means the concretization of illusions which are produced by a certain psychological state which in itself is the result of satisfaction or "eclipse" of human aspirations.

Have we the time, in our short human life, to weigh out the comparative value of these estimations and speculations and to draw conclusions from them? Surely this is a luxury reserved for those who favor the contemplative life and who have too much time.

Let us consider our human life as Vietnamese. It is a life in not very tempting circumstances. . . . in the sense that our compatriots are suffering so much. How much misfortune, how much suffering! What deprivations in the history of the Vietnamese, all through the ages. . . . Let us examine our religions and our ideologies: what have they done for us Vietnamese? What is there as to relations between human beings proposed by them that is palpable, seizable, tangible? What is the role of our religion, in comparison with others, in our social and historical life?

We are not, then, going to offer one religion or another, but a religious and cultural *ideal*. In other words, we are going to attend to the Vietnamese as a person, to the Vietnamese society. . . . in the sequence of our actions, imbedded in the historical background of Vietnam. Religion is not an end in itself, but the means to get there. That is not to say that we want to change religious organizations into social and political forces. We persist in our intention to realize a religious ideal—and in our refusal to orient all our social activities toward consolidation and stabilization of religion, in order to win a certain pride of religious authority as an outcome of these activities, a privileged place for one or the

other religion—to decide which one is our proper place, and which one theirs. . . . Such aspirations, such ambitions are degrading for our religion. There is a great difference between the apparent extent of a religion and its actual moral and intellectual content. Some religions may appear like an imposing colossus, but contain an idea-value in the process of decomposition—and, thus, all efforts in the direction of this formal greatness would run counter to the spirit of this religion.

Therefore, a dialogue between Buddhist and Buddhist as well as a dialogue between Buddhist and Non-Buddhist will have to be opened among men of good will, whose hearts are imbued with a humanism of a sincerity proof against everything. If we talk and talk about *Nirvana*, Paradise, a possible or impossible Beyond—the notions about whose probability or improbability rest on a much too metaphysical basis, unverifiable either by the senses or by intellect—we only add to the mental and spiritual misery of the time, and the wounds inflicted on man during his history are already too many.

Confucius, in answer to a question by one of his disciples about what happens after death, once said: "Listen, do you understand everything about life? Why try to understand what death is about?" Sakya-Mouni expressed a similar idea: "There is no point in trying to find out whether the world is finite or not, or whether its poles are probable or not. . . . First of all, we have to recognize this shocking truth, this glaring reality: *man is suffering*. . . ."

Therefore, let us begin with the reality of human suffering, and let us remain this side of any metaphysical world.

BIKSHU THICH NHAT HANH

SAIGON

## *REVIEW*

### HOLISM IN MEDICAL THEORY

BEFORE a man can act with full deliberation, he has to have a view of the world and himself which, taken together, make some kind of unified sense. Usually, this capacity, if it develops at all, comes with age—with what we call "maturity." A man is regarded as "mature" when he is able to make his behavior understandable to others. Intellectual brilliance without this maturity seems to produce a flashy impotence which is vastly confusing to people who are unable to follow the dance of abstractions yet can see well enough that it does not lead to anything good. A culture in which intelligence has largely specialized in intellectual analysis is paralyzed by institutionalized forms of this confusion, making social maturity extremely difficult to achieve. Since the cost of such prolonged cultural "adolescence" can be very high to a populous civilization, any signs of emerging views of coherence and holistic understanding in the intellectual professions need to be recognized with interest and enthusiasm, since only in these developments is there any promise of the maturity which enables action to serve the common good.

One such line of thinking is evident in an article by Dr. Tom Brewer, of the Contra Costa Health Services (Martinez, Calif.), in the *American Behavioral Scientist* for June, 1966. While this article is titled, "Political Effects of the Material Basis of Human Thought," the content it presents provides rather a kind of mirror image, reflected in the physiology of the brain, of the operations of thought. This point, however, is only a detail, since the author has little interest in side-taking on the old mind-over-matter issue. He has a theory to propose and defend. It is that growth in human understanding is marked by the elaboration of new neuron circuits in the cerebral cortex, and that this development is a function of the assimilation of *experience* by the individual. The extensions of experience made possible by the human use of symbols give opportunity for accelerated growth. There are, however, certain

problems which arise from the symbols themselves. Dr. Brewer quotes from *A Model of the Brain* by J. Z. Young:

. . . there are evidently risks within the language systems and socio-economic systems themselves. The proper use of these means of communication depends upon a degree of cooperation that is not always readily elicited, especially between larger groups of people. Perhaps inquiry into the fundamental nature of the information-gathering circuits and the types of models that they produce may help towards ensuring the stability of life.

Dr. Brewer's main proposition is:

All areas of the cerebral cortex are linked together by long tracts of "association" fibers which must be involved in the storing of an "experience" made up of several sensory modalities as well as motor activity. A continuum of experience is folded into ever-expanding circuits which are organized into reverberating arcs involving many neurons in different parts of the brain yet remaining on *specific pathways*.

An interesting feature of this paper is the writer's use of his own subjective experience. Watching a sunset in 1962, he found himself comparing its beauty with the sunset he observed the night before. The fact of the *comparison* meant to him that: "One scene or pattern is direct experience coming in over my visual system from my retinae and dynamically recorded moment by moment, and the other must be stored on reverberating circuits in memory and brought into my consciousness by *association* with the direct experience." From this he deduced: "All learning can be viewed as the establishment of new neuron circuits within the central nervous system as a result of experience." (We've left out a lot of Dr. Brewer's reasoning to reach this conclusion.) He now returns to the subjective point of view, asking how this theory of learning might throw light on psychotherapy. Recalling his student days and work on hospital wards, he says:

I was always at a loss to understand how the psychotherapist's techniques really worked. There was no question that in some cases human beings showed improvement under therapy, but just as often there was no improvement. What was going on? I

could find no satisfactory answers from my professors, textbooks, or the current literature.

In psychotherapy, Dr. Brewer says, the patient starts out with the protective shield of the therapist's father-like concern:

In psychotherapy of the "analytic" type, the patient sits in the accepting presence of the new "father" who is kind, patient, interested, mature, and protective—and the new circuits continue to open up in the patient's brain—and he is often encouraged to "freely associate." What does the therapist *do*? Compared with the surgeon, very little! It is the *experience* itself which is therapeutic. Without specific words, the physician conveys to the patient in time, into these expanding circuits, feelings of acceptance and understanding and forgiveness for imagined or real "sins." The patient gradually comes to realize that his thoughts and feelings are *understood* by another person outside himself; the patient practices communication, both verbal and nonverbal. As the maturing process continues, the patient comes to realize that this "father figure" is, in fact, human like himself and unable to "read his mind" or to control his thoughts and feelings. There is a reshaping or remoulding of conscience with relief of guilt for past transgressions—in successful therapy. This process usually requires years in the same manner that years of experiences were recorded *before* the patient sought therapy, and these newer ways of more rational thinking, this change in value system and new behavior have to be learned or superimposed on the more primitive, inadequate patterns of illness, and at the same time the patient and physician are moving through the reality of life experience, an "unrestrainable" process.

Dr. Brewer now turns to wider applications of this view of learning, beginning with a general statement:

The eternal quest of the human cerebral cortex is to find meaning in its complex experiences, to find "truth," certainty, and security in a confusing, uncertain, and insecure world. Moment by moment, life flows by and tragedy often strikes individuals and groups; men, women, and children often suffer, feel lost, isolated, "left behind" or "left out"; sometimes they starve, and sometimes they seek "defenses" to escape the final "tragedy" of personal death with extinction of the ego.

This sets the problem of the human situation in the classical mode. Since we *must* find

meanings in order to relate to our environment, and since all readings of the meaning of experience have a confining as well as an explaining aspect, the project becomes one of "staying loose," of learning how to work with tentative attitudes and explanations without succumbing to the "easy way" of hardening certainties. Dr. Brewer puts the polarities of decision in these words:

The staged unfolding of a human life situation is apparently under the "direction" of some rational force, in this case the author or director who gives meaning, or apparent meaning, to the human experiences portrayed. In real life, in the reality of individual experience from moment to moment, we can find no such "outside director" to give meaning to the human struggle. At present in organized societies, human *authorities* assume this role, often in the name of some supernatural force or abstract idea. The mature mind must give meaning and direction to human life and this is no easy task in an indifferent universe.

The temptations of a premature or illusory security are hard to resist. Dr. Brewer describes at length the confining chrysalis of thought carefully spun by the indoctrinating religions, showing how those who are trained from childhood in simplistic beliefs "will react *emotionally* to any conflicting point of view which challenges the integrity of the Absolute Truth of his own input system of values." It is this transmission of authoritative "certainties" from one generation to another, in response to the "neurophysiological need of the human brain for certainty and meaning," that makes maturity difficult. As Dr. Brewer puts it:

Only by the most radical break with tradition and the past, only by the most intense, sustained human efforts to create a new human situation, to produce a *human synthesis* based on the concepts of organic evolution and the objective analysis of human history and social evolution, only by these heroic and demanding efforts to unite all men, women and children across national, ideological, religious, racial and economic barriers and conflicts can the disastrous World War III be prevented. . . . To avert global disaster with widespread human . . . suffering, death and starvation, *responsible* and dedicated citizens

within their own national cultures must make the most intensive struggle against irrational and irresponsible authorities, and this struggle must be oriented in the correct way for each nation. An accurate and scientific concept of how the human brain functions and develops can help mankind win this struggle for survival.

Here, one might say, is a clear statement of primary human need; what remains to be done is the development of clear ideas about the *heroic* resources of human beings, which, as Dr. Brewer implies, will have to be aroused if the need is to be met.

## COMMENTARY THICH NHAT HANH

THIS week's lead article is an English translation of a paper by Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk who recently visited the United States under the auspices of the International Committee of Conscience on Vietnam (Fellowship of Reconciliation). "I have come to America," he said, "to describe to you the aspirations and the agony of the voiceless masses of the Vietnamese people of all faiths who have no means to speak for themselves." He came despite a decree by Premier Ky "that any Vietnamese who speaks aloud for peace may be executed in the Saigon marketplace." Thich Nhat Hanh teaches in the Buddhist University in Saigon and is director of Youth for Social Service, a group engaged in a work-study program for village development and reconstruction. He studied philosophy of religion at Princeton in 1961, lectured on Buddhism at Columbia in 1963, and returned to Vietnam at the urgent call of Thich Tri Quang to work for the peace and freedom of his country. He is a leader in the Buddhist social movement, editor of the principal Buddhist weekly, and one of Vietnam's best-known poets. Among his books are *Oriental Logic*, *Engaged Buddhism*, and *Actualized Buddhism*.

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### THE AUTONOMOUS INDIVIDUAL

The passage quoted from Plato's *Republic* (Book Four) by Eric Havelock (see this week's "Children") is as follows:

Righteousness pertains to the inner action not the outer, to oneself and to the elements of the self, restricting the specific elements in one's self to their respective roles, forbidding the types in the *psyche* to get mixed up in one another's business; requiring a man to make a proper disposition of his several properties and to assume command of himself and to organize himself and become a friend of himself . . . becoming in all respects a single person instead of many. . . .

In Book Three, Mr. Havelock points out, Plato focuses on "the psychological protection of the guardian during the course of his education." He warns against exposing the future guardians to "inferior" models and speaks of their susceptibility to "imitations starting in early youth." Plato observes: ". . . we do not want our guardian to be a 'two-aspect man' nor a 'many-aspect' man, nor do we want an artist who can become 'any kind of person'." The guardian, as Mr. Havelock summarizes—

has to be "an effective guardian of himself and of the music he has been learning, presenting himself rhythmically well organized and harmonized." This comes near to a conception of an inner stability of the personality, self-organized and autonomous, a stability not possible under the existing practice of poetic education. . . . there is a faculty (*dynamic*) in the *psyche*, an organ which every man uses in the learning process, and it is this innate faculty which, like a physical eye, must be converted toward new objects. . . . "Thinking" is a "function (*arete*) of the *psyche* supreme above all others. . . . In this way, that autonomous self-governing personality defined in Book Four becomes symbolized as the power to think, to calculate, to cogitate, and to know, in total distinction from the capacity to see, to hear, to feel. . . . He [Plato] is now . . . in a position totally to reject the whole mimetic process as such. He has to propose that the Greek mind find an entirely new basis for its education. Hence the extreme position in the matter of the arts put forward in Book Ten, so far from being an eccentricity or a reply to some fleeting fashion in education, becomes the logical and inevitable climax to the systematic doctrine of the *Republic*.

# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### BOOK NOTES

READERS who were entranced by the extracts from Edgar Z. Friedenberg's Preface to *The Vanishing Adolescent* (printed here two weeks ago) will be interested to know that Mr. Friedenberg has written another book of this sort. The core of *Coming of Age in America* (Random House, 1963) is a report of research into the attitudes of high school students by means of a series of psychological tests, involving hundreds of interviews at a variety of American schools. The jacket description provides an apt summary:

The results of this study will be of great concern to teachers and administrators, as well as to parents and to the students themselves. Professor Friedenberg's research makes it clear that through pressures both direct and indirect the schools encourage and demand that the student relinquish his autonomy, sacrifice his personal desires, and often reject his particular excellence on behalf of institutional and social considerations which themselves are often trivial.

Professor Friedenberg's demonstration of how secondary schools in America oblige the student to internalize the authority of the school—while those who resist tend to drop out or are rejected by the system—will prove to be a milestone in social analysis. His proposals for new, more flexible and humane arrangements that society might make for the generations coming of age, will surely provoke serious reconsiderations of the prevailing system.

There is a close relation between Eric A. Havelock's scholarly study, *Preface to Plato* (Harvard University Press, 1963, \$5.75), and Mr. Friedenberg's conclusions. Mr. Havelock undertakes to explain a major puzzle of Platonic scholarship—Plato's opposition to the poets. He does this in a way that will delight all lovers of Plato who have been dismayed and embarrassed by his tough-minded exclusion of the poets from his ideal Republic. Briefly, by "poets" Plato means the cultural authorities who indoctrinate the populace in conformities and justifications of moral compromise of the sort Mr. Friedenberg finds so subversive of

the autonomy of the students in American high schools. If this seems an unlikely parallel, we can only say that Mr. Havelock needs to be read.

There are also interesting connections between the content of *Preface to Plato* and the audio-visual dynamics of the psychology of a preliterate society which the work of Marshall McLuhan has brought to the foreground of attention. For it is precisely these dynamics which Mr. Havelock explores, in order to show what "poetry" meant to Plato in the pejorative sense. His documentation goes on and on, and the ordinary reader is likely to cry, "Okay, okay, I'm convinced," long before finishing the book. But most people will finish it, anyhow, because the discussion has intrinsic interest beyond the defense of Plato. This is the kind of a book which entirely justifies the high traditional value placed upon scholarship and learning. It makes the wealth of the cultural heritage available to ordinary readers.

It was the "poets," Mr. Havelock shows, who had the role of transmitting from one generation to another the norms and conventions, the assumptions and complacencies, of the preliterate society of the Greeks. Mr. Havelock calls this mode of communication the "oral state of mind." You could say that Plato was against the misuse of this mode of communication for the same excellent reasons that thoughtful men of today are against the saturation techniques of television. The sensory flood and emotional components make psychological independence and criticism

Plato's study of education (in the *Republic*) came at a time of transition from oral communication to a wider use of books, Mr. Havelock thinks:

. . . up to his [Plato's] day, the educational apparatus, as so often since, lagged behind technological advance, and preferred to adhere to traditional methods of oral instruction when other possibilities were becoming available. It is only too likely that Plato is describing a situation which was on the way to being changed when he wrote. The testimony of the orators could probably be used to show that by the middle of the fourth century the silent revolution had been accomplished and that the cultivated Greek public had become a community of readers.

However, for Plato this is not the assumption, nor is he interested in noticing the possibility of change, and for a very fundamental reason. Once it is accepted that the oral situation had persisted through the fifth century, one faces the conclusion that there would also persist what one may call an oral state of mind as well; a mode of consciousness, so to speak, and, as we shall see, a vocabulary and a syntax, which were not that of a literate bookish culture. And once one admits this and admits that the oral state of mind would show a time lag so that it persisted into a new epoch when the technology of communication had changed, it becomes understandable that the oral state of mind is still for Plato the main enemy.

Or, as McLuhan would say, with his attention-getting half-truth—"The medium is the message,"

The poets, Mr. Havelock points out, had the role of standardizing Greek culture and giving it "what we might call a common consciousness and a common sense of values." In this sense poetry is a

linguistic statement or paradigm, telling us what we are and how we should behave . . . not developed by happy chance but as a statement which is formed to be drilled into successive generations as they grow up within the family or clan system. It provides the content of the educational apparatus of the group. This is true of literate societies in which the necessary conditioning is acquired through books or controlled by written documents as it was in preliterate society which lacked documents.

There is this account of the subtle persuasions of the poetic form:

In a preliterate society, how is this statement preserved? The answer inescapably is: in the living memories of successive living people who are young and then old and then die. . . . The only possible verbal technology available to guarantee the preservation and fixity of transmission was that of the rhythmic word organized cunningly in verbal and metrical patterns which were unique enough to retain their shape. This is the historical genesis, the *fons et origo*, the moving cause of that phenomenon we still call poetry. But when we consider how utterly the function of poetry has altered, how completely the cultural situation has changed, it becomes possible to understand that when Plato is talking about poetry he is not really talking about our kind of poetry. . . . If Plato could deal with poetry as though it were a kind of reference library or as a vast tractate in ethics and politics and warfare and the like, he is reporting its immemorial function in an oral culture and testifying

to the fact that this remained its function in Greek society down to his own day. It is first and last a didactic instrument for transmitting the tradition. And if . . . he treats it throughout the *Republic* as though it enjoyed in current practice a complete monopoly over training in citizenship, he likewise is describing with faithfulness the educational mechanisms of such a culture. The linguistic content had to be poetic or else it was nothing.

Later, reviewing Plato's discussion of the education of the guardians, Mr. Havelock examines the psychological dynamics which were Plato's central concern. We conclude with the following perceptive passage:

When we read Plato, we can sometimes be convinced that there was no salvation outside of society, while at other times it is the kingdom within man which is all-sufficient. The *Republic* is bifocal in its emphasis. In the present passage [reproduced elsewhere—see page 4] at least the philosopher speaks as though, if justice were founded within one's own soul, it would be occupying the only entity which exists beyond time and place and circumstance. This, when he wrote, was a very new conception for Greece. It is put forward in this place with only indirect reference to the problems raised by poetic "imitation," or, as we have interpreted it, psychological identification. The connection is there, for Plato's description of this subject who has become "one person" instead of many recalls his description of that condition proper to the young guardian and who has had the proper kind of education, and has escaped the dangers of *mimesis* [practiced by the poets].

The next stage in the unfolding of Plato's psychology comes only in Book Seven. He has in the meantime confronted us with society's need to be governed not simply by guardians but by intellectuals, the philosopher-kings. What is the difference? It lies in the crucial distinction between the average experience of average men and a knowledge of the Forms; between the kind of mind which accepts and absorbs the passing show uncritically, and the intelligence which has been trained to grasp formulas and categories which lie behind the panorama of experience. The parables of the Sun, the Line and the Cave have been offered as paradigms which shall illuminate the relationship between ideal knowledge on the one hand and empirical experience on the other, and shall suggest to us the ascent of man towards the life of reasoned intelligence.

## *FRONTIERS* To Be or Not To Be

The older woman smiled understandingly but with a trace of sadness at the girl as she said, "I certainly understand now why you did as you did, but you see I really have no choice in the matter. If I made an exception for you now, then I'd have to make an exception for everyone else who had good reasons for breaking the rules. Pretty soon the rules would be meaningless, wouldn't they? So, although I really am sorry about it, the situation is clear and it calls for you to be restricted to campus for the next month.

AT a meeting of the California Association of Deans of Women, held last March in Santa Barbara, the humanistic psychologist, James F. T. Bugental, of Los Angeles, began his address with this episode in the life of a Dean. The case of this girl, who may now lose her off-campus job and be unable, therefore, to continue in school, is a paradigm of the problem of maintaining the rule of "law"—if you don't maintain it, it becomes "meaningless." Dr. Bugental continues with discussion of this incident, explaining that later the Dean remarked:

"I don't know what it is that keeps bothering me about that interview. The student has probably forgotten it by now but I feel restless whenever I think about it. It's like there's something I've overlooked, but I can't think what it might be."

Dr. Bugental comments:

She *has* overlooked something. She has overlooked something just as our whole culture tends to overlook that something and more. She has overlooked the student's and her own humanity. She has made herself and the student objects controlled by the rules. She doesn't administer the rules. The rules administer her.

When the Dean said she had "no choice in the matter," she was also saying:

"Human understanding is not truly significant; if it were, my understanding would be some help to you now. Human empathy is ultimately impotent, the impersonal structure of which we are both parts is stronger. I am not choosing; if I or my feelings counted, the outcome would be different." . . .

. . . the underlying message is, "Rules have meanings in themselves. We must respect those meanings no matter how we feel. You can see I'm sorry, but my being sorry doesn't have any weight against the meanings in the rules. Also the situation has an implicit meaning apart from we who are concerned with it or my feelings and your reasons. The situation and the rules together dictate your punishment. It's nothing personal."

Dr. Bugental now turns to a generalizing description of this issue, which, he says, confronts our entire society:

There is no single name for it. . . . Some of the names I can use may help to point the general direction, however. Thus I can speak of the problem of existential choice, of the subject-object dichotomy, of the conflict between behavioristic and humanistic psychologies, of the threat to individual dignity potential in the population explosion . . . or of the Dean of Women's dilemma in balancing respect for law and order against appreciation of the individual's needs and problems. . . . Let me try to enlarge. . . . Man, we may recognize, may be viewed from either of two major perspectives: The inner, subjective, experience-centered or the outer, objective, behavior-centered.

The objective view of man sees him as an object, as the name implies. "Object" here is used as it is in grammar, to refer to the-thing-done-to, the recipient of the action. The objective view therefore looks for stimuli impinging on the organism, and seeks causes residing outside the organism. The objective view is useful in thinking about matters such as rapid transit, employment trends, public health, and mega-kill.

On the other hand, the subjective view of man sees him as the subject of his own life. And "subject" here means, as in grammar, the doer, the one taking action, the one acting upon objects. The subjective view tries to understand how things look to the person, what it is the person wants to experience, how the person can change the environment to fit his wants and thus this perspective speaks of reasons, not of causes. The subjective view is essential to understanding particular persons in the midst of their own lives and to helping those persons to make their lives more fulfilling. . . .

A key concept differentiating the two perspectives is that of interchangeability. The objective view sees men as interchangeable; the individuality is not recognized as such. The

subjective view insists on the uniqueness of each person.

Now the point of this talk is that while both perspectives have their validity, when the subjective outlook is suppressed in behalf of the nice, manageable simplicity of the objective view, *humanity* is also suppressed. This is not a brief for a formula choice on the part of the Dean, in the incident given, but for the fact that there is *a decision* to be made by a *human being*. As Dr. Bugental points out, these questions remain:

"What's the answer?" "What should [the Dean of Women] have done?" "What should I do?" Here's the rub. . . . *There is no answer*. When we seek for an answer in that fashion we engage in the very same displacement of subject-hood that the Dean did in the application of the rules. . . . If there were an answer, then there would be no need of the person. A person is an answerer, but if he answers in terms of the rules then there is no need of the person; pragmatically, he does not exist. Existentially, he is non-being.

At issue here is not the mechanical perfection of a set of unequivocal rules. The total security of the man who goes by the book is gained at the cost of being human. The issue is in learning how to move from decision to decision, not from certainty to certainty. The issue is to recognize there is no escape from human choice, no release from moral obligation, no excuse for not using all the light we have, each time, and each time anew. If we don't use what light we have, we'll never get any more; and if we don't get any more, we'll soon lose what we have, which means . . . non-being.

Eventually, when the rule-book path is followed without question, you get a society in which no one even bothers to say he's "sorry." No point. Nobody is sorry. This is the passage from impotent moral awareness to loss of moral awareness—what Kafka was illustrating in *The Trial*.

We have a story to relate on the other side of the ledger. The scene is a "trial" at a Synanon House in the early days. One of the *directors* had been caught sneaking drinks of cough medicine with codeine in it. He was desperately ashamed of

himself. His co-directors all felt violated and betrayed. They were very tough on him. They wanted to throw the book at him. Then the founder of Synanon made a comment. "You can punish a boy," he said, "but you can't punish a man." There was a sense in which the book fell off the table, out of sight, at that moment. The offender had to fix his own punishment, decide on his own discipline. He did. Then, the next day, the founder saw him sitting on a sofa, enduring his pain. They talked a bit—as though the incident had never happened. The founder pulled fifty dollars out of his pocket, handed it to the ex-director and said: "The House needs cigarettes—go out and buy them."

"You mean you trust me?" the young man asked in wonder. The answer was yes.

Of course, it doesn't always work that way. Nothing does. Growth and freedom involve risk. What would a world governed by this sort of uncertainty be like? Dr. Bugental's answer is as good as any:

If we broaden our perspective once more to life in general then we must recognize that none of us has any real idea of what a truly subjectively oriented world would be like. It certainly would be radically different from anything we now know, I imagine. Efficiency would probably not be a very high value; consistency, a by-product at best. Uniformity would be a vice or at least a serious fault. Objectivity and impersonality about human experience clearly would be perversions and quite probably would be felt to be quite obscene.