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THE PROBLEMS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

WITHOUT pretending to any further knowledge of mental illness than that supplied by the dictionary, one may seriously ask himself whether there is not an inevitable relationship between righteousness and paranoia. If you look at the past four or five hundred years of history with the dispassion that comes with time, righteousness begins to appear as the major offender in bringing about war. Religious wars are wars in defense of righteousness. The conflicts produced by the hostile doctrines of the Divine right of kings and the rights of peoples and nations were wars to establish Righteousness in power. By the middle of the nineteenth century, a war of looting and acquisition was hardly possible, save in the guise of some righteous cause. When, in 1854, to justify policies that would involve his country in the Crimean War, Napoleon III declared that "France has no thought of aggrandizement," he used a moral rhetoric that was soon to become standard in political apologetics.

> The day of conquests by force [he said] is past, never to return. Not in extending the limits of its territory may a nation henceforward be honored and powerful. It must take the lead in behalf of noble ideals and bring the dominion of justice and righteousness everywhere to prevail.

Pronouncements of this sort led William James to remark in 1910, four years before the beginning of the war to "make the world safe for democracy," that "It is plain that on this subject civilized man has developed a sort of double personality." This state of mind, which we would now call "schizoid," he described as follows:

> At the present day, civilized opinion is a curious mental mixture. The military instincts are as strong as ever, but are confronted by reflective criticisms which sorely curb their ancient freedom. Innumerable writers are showing up the bestial side of military service. Pure loot and mastery seem no longer morally avowable motives, and pretexts must be found for attributing them solely to the enemy. . . . "Peace" in military mouths today is a synonym for "war expected." The word has become a pure provocative, and no government wishing peace sincerely should allow it ever to be printed in a newspaper.

Our situation has not changed. The rhetoric of righteousness is a source of so much confusion, today, that dozens of groups take it upon themselves to warn the rest of the population against various alleged misuses of words. A recent leaflet published by self-appointed guardians of the national being, concerned with "how to tell a communist," invites suspicion of people who make frequent use of words like "peace" and "freedom," and even "mother" is included, since mothers now sometimes claim that their role of replenishing the race entitles them to take part in movements opposing war. Terms standing for righteousness are turned into epithets with reverse meaning. "Idealists" was a word which dripped contempt in the mouths of America First speakers who opposed the entry of the United States into World War II. And "peace-mongers" and "peaceniks" now serve a similar purpose.

There are really two regions of inquiry here. One covers the obvious need to determine true righteousness, as distinguished from false claims. For this, simply on grounds of common sense, you need the full functioning of the institutions of a free society—most of all, of course, an impartial and courageous press. And this we have hardly at all. Public education in current events can hardly take place in an atmosphere dominated by clichés and slogans.

The other area of investigation concerns the psychology of righteousness. Is righteousness a human necessity? Could we possibly do without that sense of stern resolve, that ardor for a

preconceived good, on which so much human enterprise seems to be based?

Simply to ask such questions brings the feeling of stepping into treacherous quicksands of doubt. Would men believe in anything at all, divorced from a sense of righteousness in their cause? If a human being is, above all else, a moral agent, would he not become a kind of "nothing," a motiveless clod, or a creature with no more than animal instincts, unless he exercised continually his judgmental frame of mind?

This argument settles nothing. It is one of the traditional justifications of the status quo. It takes no account of the private agony of men who, in the midst of vast undertakings, suffer a sudden realization of the brutal destruction their righteousness has brought. What shall we say to ourselves about individuals who become vulnerable to extreme self-distrust because of a deep moral sensibility? There must be such men in high places. If we believe in humanity at all, we must believe this.

We have begun a line of questioning which often degenerates into over-simplified solutions. One could say, for example, that the world is inevitably a wicked place, and go into retreat. You can always get an acre of land and a goat. You can become the kind of an anarchist who nourishes himself mainly on the contempt he feels for people who still try to manipulate a resolution of the psycho-moral split between organized social and personal life. Or you can say that the only way to live or survive, in this world, is to become tough and selfish. It is always (or still) possible to opt out of a difficult situation, but the honest men who do this never claim they have found a "solution." They say it is too much for them, or that they don't know what to do. Such people have a basic kind of integrity—more, at any rate, than is found in most of the claims to "righteousness."

But is it possible to do anything further?

Can there, for example, be human sympathy without any claim of righteousness—indeed, without even thought of being "right"? We know there can. Some law of psychological incompatibility separates righteousness and genuine compassion. But it will be said that while individuals may embody compassion, it is useless to organized communities and states. Law declares for righteousness, and law must be enforced.

One wonders about this defense of righteousness. Especially the reader of Lao-tse wonders about it. There has to be a way to use law which does not lead to the brink of a decision which, going in one direction will suddenly erase millions of people from the world; or, going in the other, become acknowledgement of a terrible loss of faith, amounting, also, to betrayal to those who accepted without questioning what they were told were righteous necessities.

The more talk there is of righteousness, the more difficult it becomes to put into practice. The more precisely righteousness is defined, the more it produces contradictions. Yet all our history makes us ask whether the following, from Lao-tse, does not mean the abdication of moral responsibility. Concerning the art of government, he wrote:

> As restrictions and prohibitions are multiplied in the Empire, the people grow poorer and poorer. When the people are subjected to overmuch government, the land is thrown into confusion. When the people are skilled in many cunning arts strange are the objects of luxury that appear.
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> The greater the number of laws and enactments, the more thieves and robbers there will be. . . . If the government is sluggish and tolerant, the people will be honest and free from guile.
>
> Cast off your holiness, rid yourself of sagacity, and the people will benefit an hundredfold. Discard benevolence and abolish righteousness, and the people will return to filial piety and paternal love. Renounce your scheming and abandon gain, and thieves and robbers will disappear.

Surely this was meant for some other world than ours! Yet there is meaning in saying that Americans have taken on too much righteousness—far more than they can handle either in politics or in their private lives. A recent book, *The Hidden Remnant*, by Gerald Sykes, makes this essentially Taoist argument:

> If Europe understood why America, which once seemed to her so vigorous, so sprightly, now has lost the *mystique* of invincible, evil-destroying youth, but suffers instead from some visible middle-aged disorders, she would laugh at first and thoroughly enjoy our comedown, but after a while she would see us as more human and more interesting. It is our dazed or mendacious unrelatedness to the humbling facts of common experience that has puzzled observant Europeans. As a matter of fact, they have *already* been laughing at our comedown, which they regard as *fait accompli*, but they do not yet understand what is behind it; the revolution that we refused and that *they* also are pretty sure to refuse when it is required of them.
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> The technical revolution demands in time that man be equal to his own creations. He cannot merely run his airplane well. His consciousness must go as high as his body does. He must be not merely a flyer but a Saint-Exupery. This may have been a reason why, as Lombroso suggests, the great innovators of the Renaissance called a halt to their inventions; they sensed that men would not be worthy of them. But we have gone ahead with ours, and now we must equal them or perish. A first step would be to realize how dangerous they are to mental health. One can so easily misuse them as ways of short-circuiting personal experience.

Where is the Taoist moral for us? It lies, first of all, in our need for admitting our own deep anxiety, our intuitive horror at what we seem compelled to do to retain our righteousness. We have too much "sagacity," and not enough willingness to face our inner uncertainties. For all too many peoples of the world, our bold front stands for a loss of humanity. Mr. Sykes puts it well:

> It is not enough to say that time is working against the Russians, that the countries near them have seen through their myth, and the more remote countries will see through it in time. It is still united to a hardheaded political program that can have a great appeal among proletarians. (Our own dishonesty about class would be purged by some truth-telling.) It is also united to a strong will to leadership. There is little evidence that our will to leadership is strong. What we have to say is more reasonable. We are obliged to speak the plain talk that daily use of technical power bestows along with its advantages. *We* do not feel romantic any more about machinery. We are further along; that is, more seriously uprooted, poorer in time-tested imagery. But we are also further along in historical development, we have lived with the new power long enough to know what it costs in continuous effort toward consciousness, unless one is to be dehumanized by it. So we—or those of us able to speak out—have a great deal more to say than the Russians. To become a true moral dynamic, however our discoveries must become part of a profound religious experience that genuine leaders will share with our people.
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> The conditions for such a sharing of experience are not here. Our genuine leaders live on a level of experience which alienates them from their people, because the people are being deliberately alienated, through the mass communications, from themselves. It is therefore not enough to gloat about "the god that failed." Anticommunism soon degenerates into impotent self-righteousness. Our job is *to find the new god that is within us.* That alone will heal the breach between the leaders and the people, but it will require much re-education of everyone. First, a great many of us must learn not to be put off by metaphorical language which speaks of "the new god that is within us." Our mind has produced all the gods. Some day, after great travail, it will produce a new one (which may be an old one, redefined) in whom the subtlest minds of our leaders and the earthiest minds of our people can find some agreement. The best in philosophy, government, science, literature, and art is an effort in this direction.

It must be admitted that from a common-sense point of view what Mr. Sykes writes here is obscure. It is less obscure if you read his whole book, but no one who is unwilling to become skeptical of the vigorous pursuit of "righteous" action can be expected to find much sense in this passage. Understanding Mr. Sykes requires admission that human fulfillment and achievement of the good are involved in profound mysteries, and the righteous activist soon suspects that the

very foundations of his moral life are undermined by this idea.

This issue has another case implicit in the argument about the relationship between church and state. In any society where living religion exists, there must be friction between the righteousness aspect of the political arrangements and the search for inner truth. You could say that the condition of unstable equilibrium between the claims of two kinds of authority—the inner authority which governs a whole human being's growth processes, and the outer authority of a social organization created to establish the social good—is an absolute necessity of authentic human life. No mechanical resolution of their differences can be made to work, except by the sacrifice of either one or the other of the elements involved. And there seems to be a natural tendency for each kind of authority to displace the other.

For example, in the United States, the critical area of moral balance between the inner and outer authorities is defined by the Bill of Rights. The problem is one of relating essentially unpredictable qualities of thought and behavior to the legally defined, although continually changing and enlarging, requirements of social righteousness.

The assumption is, for most of us, in this situation that it is really possible to outline righteous programs and put them into effect by wise and well-considered acts of legislation. The constitution defines the best techniques we know of to fulfill this expectation. And we have nearly two hundred years of experience for evidence that the general plan really works. This is what we mean by our "way of life," and explains why, on the whole, we are exceedingly proud of the record. This sense of achievement—and it need not be complacent or over-confident—is shared by a great many conscientious citizens and responsible leaders.

But then, along comes a difficult, almost unbearable historical situation like the civil war in Viet Nam, as a result of which the immediate moral sensibilities of a growing number of people cry out that the dictates of social righteousness have become too evil to be borne. They demand an abdication of the outer authority of social organization, and the issue is joined. There is an acute case of imbalance and breakdown between the two authorities in human life. The society is wracked by pain, and the pain, in righteous men, tends to produce righteous indignation. And when righteous indignation becomes the argument of rival stances of virtue, a dialogue which was never easy is rendered almost impossible.

Seeing this hardly gives an excuse for failing to take a position. As a moral agent you have to take some kind of position. The only value of an analysis of this sort lies in its recognition that such dilemmas are an inevitable result of the moral ideas of our time.

This is a way of saying that life as we believe we must live it inevitably creates extreme conflicts of principle. Individuals may find some personal resolution in relation to these conflicts by accepting the pain and the fact that the resolving truth for individuals is always paradoxical, but what Mr. Sykes is trying to suggest is that the resolving truth for organized societies is *also* paradoxical.

But how can this idea even be contemplated, much less incorporated into a social system by righteously intending men? Well, it has already had vague, partial acceptance in expressions such as "the best government is the least government," and it was anticipated in a slightly Machiavellian passage of Lao-tse:

> In the highest antiquity, the people did not know they had rulers. In the next age they loved and praised them. In the next, they feared them. In the next they despised them.

The *pur sang* believer in social righteousness has no patience with dark sayings of this sort, yet is himself the one who all too easily turns into a despiser, or into the ruler who is "despised." A law-maker frustrated by general indifference to his high purposes soon becomes a tough and angry man. And if you tell him that the more elaborate

his plans for structured righteousness, the more likely they are to lose touch with elemental decencies, he will not listen at all, but do everything he can to shut you up. Open dialogue on intuitive moral grounds is the most threatening enemy of an ideological righteousness that has been stretched almost to the breaking-point.

Why are these matters not clear to every one?

One might ask in reply, why should we suppose that they *ought* to be clear? We have done none of the self-questioning that might help make them clear. We are still carried along in our thinking by the boundless optimism of the Enlightenment, without bothering to notice that the loose and expansive societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries permitted this optimism to function as a driving energy without producing very many *noticeable* symptoms of self-contradiction.

Today, however, under the tightly organized conditions of an advanced technological society, the price we pay for rigid thinking, for brazen insistence that we are right, for failing to provide for areas of mystery and paradox in our lives, has become more than we can afford as human beings. Meanwhile the shallow moral philosophy of the times leaves us totally unprepared for an encounter of this sort.

Well, is there any way to avoid the terrible confrontations produced by mechanistic development of theories of righteousness?

This is the same as asking if humility is possible in political righteousness. A man can hardly live at all without adopting some theory of doing good, but the question is whether or not we are able to devise a theory of doing good, or of the good social order, which has in it a more fundamental admission of fallibility than, say, a bill of rights.

In short, the principle of moral uncertainty has to be a main or essential feature of the social contract. It must be a built-in guarantee for the good of the entire society, not a provision added as an after-thought in behalf of the eccentric inclinations of a few individuals and minorities.

Well, we haven't taken this problem very far, but then, we don't feel able to see very far. It is simply that one must make an effort to see at least a little further than the irreconcilable dilemmas of our present political and international involvements.

Anyone who tries to inform himself concerning the tragic circumstances of Viet Nam, today, and the part played by the United States in creating a situation which has no solution at all in terms of uncompromising "righteousness," must make it his business to understand, so far as he can, how human communities drift into such dilemmas. The first step, perhaps, is to grasp as well as one can both the assumptions and the reasoning of all the brands of righteousness that enter into the dilemma. Then, after you see how difficult it is for most people to admit that their righteousness may be deeply flawed—and how morally misleading the possession of unlimited power can become—while you still have to take a position, there is at least a chance that your position will be simply and openly a demand for an immediate end to the cruel slaughter of human beings. Even though you cannot stomach the theories of righteousness which declare that, statistically speaking, a certain amount of death and destruction is required in order that truth and justice may prevail, you are obliged to admit that *all* the well-known doctrines of social progress, since the Enlightenment, have used this self-justifying argument. So you have to put these claims aside without distinction. And even though you feel obliged to take a position from which you shout, *Let us stop the killing in Viet Nam!*, there still remains the long-term project of showing why righteous men inevitably develop compulsive systems of moral logic which lead them, finally, to the ruthless inhumanity that can end only in self-destruction.

REVIEW

"THE HEART OF MAN"

ERICH FROMM'S work of this title (Harper & Row, 1964) is an endeavor to focus psychoanalytic insight on the motivational distinctions between "good" and "evil." During recent years, Dr. Fromm has been increasingly preoccupied with socio-political concerns (and unfortunately has taken some time out to justify an apparent hostility toward Carl Jung), but in the present work he manifests a capacity for philosophical scrutiny reminiscent of his 1950 Terry Lectures, at Yale), published as *Psychoanalysis and Religion.* Initially, *The Heart of Man* seems unpleasant reading, for, as a prefatory remark explains, "the main topic is man's capacity to destroy, his narcissism and his incestuous fixation." This emphasis, however, is to clarify the nature of the destructive forces in man which block his capacity for love and his reverence for life. Dr. Fromm writes:

> I have been led to the pursuit of the study of this syndrome of decay not only on the basis of clinical experience but also by the social and political development of the past years. Ever more pressing becomes the question why, in spite of good will and knowledge of the facts about the consequences of nuclear war, the attempts to avoid it are feeble in comparison with the magnitude of the danger and the likelihood of war, given the continuation of the nuclear-arms race and the continuation of the cold war. This concern has led me to study the phenomenon of indifference to life in an ever increasingly mechanized industrialism, in which man is transformed into a thing, and as a result, is filled with anxiety and with indifference to, if not with hate against, life. But aside from that, the present-day mood of violence which is manifested in juvenile delinquency as well as in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, demands explanation and understanding as a first possible step toward change. The question arises whether we are headed for a new barbarism—even without the occurrence of nuclear war—or whether a renaissance of our humanist tradition is possible.

Putting one of these themes simply, it seems clear that men tend to act and react as they expect other men to act and react. The expectation that someone views us with hostility is both an expression and an extension of our own capacity to view another man—or another nation—with malicious intent. As Fromm showed in *Psychoanalysis and Religion,* belief in the unique goodness of God and that there is in man an inherent inclination to do evil lays the basis for habitual acceptance of hostility, greed, and the urge for domination as expressing "the heart of man." The optimistic thinkers of the Renaissance, reacting strongly against the doctrine of "original sin," developed another explanation of destructive behavior—that these urges are a response to circumstances over which man could not exercise rational control. In Marxist thinking, as well as in early humanist philosophy, this view appeared to be the antithesis of the original sin doctrine, but it had the weakness of another over-simplification. As Dr. Fromm says: "This emphasis was a healthy antidote to the underestimation of the inherent potential of evil in man—but too often it served to ridicule those who had not lost their faith in man, sometimes by misunderstanding and even distorting their position." He continues:

> As one whose views have often been misrepresented as underestimating the potential of evil within man, I want to emphasize that such sentimental optimism is not the mood of my thought. It would be difficult indeed for anyone who has had a long clinical experience as a psychoanalyst to belittle the destructive forces within man. In severely sick patients, he sees these forces at work and experiences the enormous difficulty of stopping them or of channeling their energy into constructive directions. It would be equally difficult for any person who has witnessed the explosive outburst of evil and destructiveness since the beginning of the First World War not to see the power and intensity of human destructiveness. Yet there exists the danger that the sense of powerlessness which grips people today—intellectuals as well as the average man—with ever increasing force, may lead them to accept a new version of corruption and original sin which serves as a rationalization for the defeatist view that war cannot be avoided because it is the result of the destructiveness of human nature. Such a view, which sometimes prides itself on its exquisite realism, is unrealistic.

Is man by nature, asks Fromm, a wolf, a killer by instinct? He says in reply: "The answer is of crucial importance today, when nations contemplate the use of the most destructive forces for the extinction of their 'enemies,' and seem not to be deterred even by the possibility that they themselves may be extinguished in the holocaust. If we are convinced that human nature is inherently prone to destroy, that the need to use force and violence is rooted in it, then our resistance to ever increasing brutalization will become weaker and weaker. Why resist the wolves when we are *all* wolves, although some more so than others?"

What seems difficult, but necessary, to understand is that the decisions of military, political and business leaders to wage war do not represent an extraordinary focus of evil intentions but simply the typical projection of common motivations:

> These men are not different from the average man: they are selfish, with little capacity to renounce personal advantage for the sake of others; but they are neither cruel nor vicious. When such men—who in ordinary life probably would do more good than harm—get into positions of power where they can command millions of people and control the most destructive weapons, they can cause immense harm. In civilian life they might have destroyed a competitor; in our world of powerful and sovereign states ("sovereign" means not subject to any moral law which restricts the action of the sovereign state) they may destroy the human race. *The ordinary man with extraordinary power* is the chief danger for mankind—not the fiend or the sadist. But just as one needs weapons in order to fight a war, one needs the passions of hate, indignation, destructiveness, and fear in order to get millions of people to risk their lives and to become murderers. These passions are necessary conditions for the waging of war; they are not its causes, any more than guns and bombs by themselves are causes of wars. Many observers have commented that nuclear war differs in this respect from traditional war. The man who will press the buttons sending off missiles with nuclear charges, one of which may kill hundreds of thousands of people, will hardly have the experience of killing anybody in the sense in which a soldier had this experience when he used his bayonet or a machine gun. Yet, even though the act of launching nuclear weapons is consciously nothing more than faithful obedience of an order, there remains a question of whether or not in deeper layers of the personality there must exist, if not destructive impulses, yet a deep indifference to life, to make such acts possible.

Dr. Fromm examines different types of violence to show that the immature ego is an arena for the struggle between "love of death and love of life." In the chapter, "Individual and Social Narcissism," he describes the part this force plays in the man who will seek the death of another rather than admit his own failures or mistakes:

> A dangerous pathological element in narcissism is the emotional reaction to criticism of any narcissistically cathexed position. Normally a person does not become angry when something he has done or said is criticized, provided the criticism is fair and not made with hostile intent. The narcissistic person, on the other hand, reacts with intense anger when he is criticized. He tends to feel that the criticism is a hostile attack, since by the very nature of his narcissism he can not imagine that it is justified. The intensity of this anger can be fully understood only if one considers that the narcissistic person is unrelated to the world, and as a consequence is alone and hence frightened. It is this sense of aloneness and fright which is compensated for by his narcissistic self-inflation. If he *is* the world, there is no world outside which can frighten him; if he is everything, he is not alone; consequently, when his narcissism is wounded he feels threatened in his whole existence. When the one protection against his fright, his self-inflation, is threatened, the fright emerges and results in intense fury. This fury is all the more intense because nothing can be done to diminish the threat by appropriate action; only the destruction of the critic—or oneself—can save one from the threat to one's narcissistic security.

This form of narcissism has found social and political expression again and again. Hidden under the cloak of righteousness, this narcissistic drive has arrayed Protestants against Catholics, French against Germans, whites against blacks, Aryans against non-Aryans, Communists against capitalists. In an important paragraph of his concluding chapter, Dr. Fromm writes:

> Man is inclined to regress *and* to move forward, this is another way of saying he is inclined to good *and* evil. If both inclinations are still in some balance he is free to choose, provided that he can make use of awareness and that he can make an effort. He is free to choose between alternatives which in themselves are determined by the total situation in which he finds himself. If, however, his heart is hardened to such a degree that there is no longer a balance of inclinations he is no longer free to choose. In the chain of events that lead to the loss of freedom the last decision is usually one in which man can no longer choose freely; at the first decision he may be free to choose that which leads to the good, provided he is aware of the significance of his first decision.

A final note on Freud should be of interest to many readers:

> I have never been satisfied with being classified as belonging to a new "school" of psychoanalysis whether it is called the "cultural school,"—or "Neo-Freudianism." I believe that many of these new schools, while developing valuable insights, have also lost much of the most important discoveries of Freud. I am certainly not an "orthodox Freudian." In fact, any theory which does not change within sixty years is, by this very fact, no longer the same as the original theory of the master; it is a fossilized repetition, and by being a repetition it is actually a deformation. Freud's basic discoveries were conceived in a certain philosophical frame of reference, that of the mechanistic materialism current among most natural scientists at the beginning of this century. I believe that the further development of Freud's thought requires a different philosophical frame of reference, that of *dialectical humanism.* I try to show in this book that Freud's greatest discoveries, that of the Oedipus complex, narcissism, and the death instinct were hobbled by his philosophical premises and that, freed from them and translated into a new frame of reference, Freud's findings become ever more potent and meaningful.

COMMENTARY
ACTS OF COMMITMENT

LAST week Virginia Naeve told the story of Alice Herz, the 82-year-old woman who ended her life by setting herself on fire, in protest against the extension of the war in Vietnam, and to show her sympathy with similar protests by Vietnamese Buddhists.

Another act of protest was begun last February by Lee Stern, fifty-year-old assistant to Alfred Hassler, executive secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Since February 10, Mr. Stern has had no nourishment but water and fruit juice. At the end of the first month, he took the money he saved by not eating and sent it to President Johnson, asking that it be given to the victims of the war. On March 22 Mr. Stern was joined in his fast by Horace Champney, of Yellow Springs, Ohio. In a joint statement, they said:

> Truth is indeed lost as our country refuses to face up to the fact that much of the opposition in Vietnam has grown out of unpopular governments it has established or sanctioned.

This statement concludes:

> This is not a fast of despair but one of hope . . . hope that by demonstrating how deeply we are concerned for the tragic state of our foreign policy, our president may be moved to consider an approach that is far more akin to his own great and thoughtful nature than is the blind policy his military advisers have led him to. Though death could come if there is no shift from the present intransigence this fast cannot be considered a commitment to death. It will remain a commitment to Life for Life. . . .

Sitting in a Unitarian church in Brooklyn, New York, a Vietnamese college professor, Vo Thanh Minh, was last month (his deportation was expected) fasting before an altar bearing carved images of Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, Pythagoras, and Zoroaster. Since 1949, Vo has been campaigning throughout Europe and the United States for peace and neutrality in his homeland. He told a *Peace News* (April 9) reporter: "Before the rule of the French and the U.S., we had our own democracy with our village system." While Ho Chi Minh is a kind of "George Washington" to his people, because of his victory over the Prench, the Vietnamese people, Vo said, were once largely neutral. The perpetuation of the civil war, he believes, is turning some of them into communists. Had there been an election, he said, Ho Chi Minh would "perhaps have been elected president, but his communism would have been like Tito."

A quotation from a recent column by Walter Lippmann seems a common-sense response to Vo's candid analysis. A mature world power, Mr. Lippmann said, will "eschew the theory of global and universal duty which not only commits it to unending wars of intervention, but intoxicates its thinking with the illusion that it is a crusader for righteousness, that each war is a war to end all war."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE CASE AGAINST SCHOOLING

A SHORT time ago we listened to the president of an Association of Adult Education Teachers tell a short-short story regarding a high school drop-out whose repeated failures in every subject seemed to indicate that he was incapable of absorbing high school instruction. A year or so after leaving school, this student's name appeared on the rolls of two night classes (part of adult education housed in the same school), and his first semester grades turned out to be A's! The principal of the high school, who happened to notice these grades, wondered if the night-school teachers were simply throwing good marks around without regard for the capacity of students. The young man in question was given two comprehensive tests which revealed that his ability, far from being poor, was considerably above the average. When questioned, the student replied that he had previously felt no impulsion to study subjects he didn't want to just because he was "supposed to," and at prescribed times. While he had been failing in high school, he had been reading, off and on, according to his own bent and inclination. And when he *decided* to take a class, under no pressure except his own interest, his instructors encountered what seemed to be a totally different person. The *F*-student had become an *A*-student.

This case history illustrates something most adult education teachers are very well aware of—that when learning is voluntarily sought, it is accomplished with pleasure rather than boredom or resentment. The task in adult education is often to overcome deep-rooted prejudices against classroom learning, acquired when study was compulsory and when many of the students who worked hard did so simply as competitors.

There are certainly many forces, psychological as well as societal, which foster a misconception of what education should be. An article in the *NEA Journal* for February, "The Folly of Overplacement," describes contributory parental attitudes. The writer, Jack Pollack, summarizes the explanation of the Gesell Institute of Child Development for the fact that many children do poorly in elementary grades and eventually drop out of high school. The report places primary blame upon ambitious parents who want their children to be in a grade level beyond their years. Mr. Pollack says:

> The worst offenders in this senseless speedup are those who treat their children as status symbols, starting them in the race to Harvard in the early grades. Misled by early reading or high IQ scores, such parents strive to make educational prodigies out of their offspring, often swapping a child's future happiness for the dubious honor of having him in an advanced grade.

Unfortunately, teachers are too often responsive to this sort of status-seeking by proxy. They allow children to enter school too early and try to push them ahead as part of the "national drive towards excellence." Not only may the youngsters be not yet ready for the subject-matter assigned them—they may also be unprepared for the kind of interpersonal relationships already established by the other pupils, and when this is the case their sense of inadequacy tends to paralyze what study capacities they do have. Mr. Pollack's article concludes:

> A mass of evidence indicates that boys and girls struggling to keep up with schoolwork for which they are not yet ready often sense that they are failures, even as early as the primary grades. This feeling can remain with them throughout their school years and produce untold harm.
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> Take six-year-old Timmy, who was having difficulty with his second grade work in a Connecticut school. In telling his father about a class project in which the children planted seeds in pots to learn how plants grow, he told how the teacher let him go out in the yard to get some more dirt. "I was out there all alone, Daddy. I could have escaped!" the child confided.
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> Considering the fact that many children are imprisoned in a school atmosphere nowhere right for them, it is surprising that a lot of them don't try to

escape. An enthusiastic champion of the Gesell school readiness tests, Edward Summerton, a New Castle, Delaware, elementary principal, told me, "Too many of our schools are like tailors trying to fit the boy to the pants instead of the pants to the boy."

Or as authors Ilg and Ames, of the Gesell report, advise, "The right time to enter school should be when a child is truly ready and not merely some time arbitrarily decided upon by custom or by law. . . . Parents, teachers, and school administrators should keep reminding themselves that growth cannot be hurried. Cultivating speed for its own sake has the inherent danger of producing a crash later on."

An interview with Paul Goodman, author of *Growing Up Absurd* and *Compulsory Miseducation,* is pertinent here. In this interview, published in *Peace News* (Dec. 25, 1964), Mr. Goodman contends that education does not live up to its proper definition unless the pupil is spontaneously *absorbed* in learning. Mr. Goodman feels that our whole economic system is at fault, because our culture dissociates joy and enthusiasm from work, and consequently from most of schooling. The things that people really enjoy do not, asserts Mr. Goodman, have much to do with the economic machine:

If you put together all of these things which people really *would* do, and are absorbed in doing, you'll find that they have practically no market value. You require no equipment to play. . . . Reading requires books, but that's not a very great expense. Political activity, real political activity, costs nothing at all; you just scrawl out signs, and; you know, get together with your neighbours and call a meeting in somebody's home or in a church or someplace.

If the great mass of the people were allowed to spend their time in the way that really gave them the most satisfaction, I'm afraid the gross national product might be cut as much as fifty per cent. It's a fantastic thing. Well, then, what does this mean for our society? It seems to me that, by and large, a chief purpose of our economy must be to prevent people from having the real satisfactions of life—the satisfactions which would enable them to grow, and be happy. That's a rather ghastly thought, isn't it?

For instance, an enormous amount of the effort of people in our society is to create a synthetic demand. That's what the whole advertising business is about, isn't it? There is a natural use, a rational use, for advertising. It's to give news. If you look at newspapers in, let's say, 1800, you'll find that the ads were perfectly rational: "Shipment of smoked fish has arrived from Europe. On sale very reasonable at 14 Barrow Street."

The notion of *competitive* advertising has to do with the profit system, of course, and not with use altogether. But in advertising now, in semi-monopolistic advertising, that's not even competitive, the main reason for it is artificially to stimulate demand. In other words, to trick people. It isn't what the people would ordinarily want, but it distracts them into wanting something which they wouldn't even have *thought* of.

If they want these things and make a demand for them and are willing to pay for them, to earn the money to buy the things, then of course the economic machine rolls faster. And people who are interested in the economic machine rolling faster are happy; but everybody else is that much less happy.

Of course, a good deal of it is done by threat. The whole suburban way of life is founded on the notion that if we don't have all these things, then in some way we are in outer darkness. We don't belong. Something is wrong with us. That is, the people don't look and say, "What would we really do if we did what we wanted to do?"

I'm not saying that education is not a valuable thing, but what it ought to do is to give one more and more ways to be able to enjoy the world and grow as a person, and not teach how to spend money. It has been said that the best things in life are free. I'm afraid that's true. Much more than we're willing to allow. And if that's true, then our economy is founded on a hoax and it must be clear in some dumb way to the majority of the people that this is a hoax. And they can't get out of this thing and that's why it looks like a rat race.

FRONTIERS

A Changing Pattern

THE radical movement of today is a kind of "ugly duckling," feeling its way toward a new sense of identity, with manifest longing for greater self-consciousness concerning both its objectives and its methods. It really should not be called a "movement" at all, since it is represented by so many diverse strands of thought and action.

The fundamentally new element in radical thinking is the theory (accompanied by considerable practice) of nonviolent action. The assimilation of this essentially Gandhian doctrine is producing notable effects in the constitution and character of the radical movement, especially in those countries where the advance of technology has created an almost guilt-laden awareness of the nihilistic power of modern military violence. The Gandhian idea of open confrontation of oppressors or opponents is meanwhile replacing the techniques of conspiracy and subversion. Instead of relying on the expectation of total social reorganization following the seizure of power, the new revolutionaries are trying to understand and contribute to the organic and "molecular" processes of change in communities and individuals. This means that the radicals are themselves seeking to send down roots in "open" areas of the existing society. Of the old methods, "protest" and "demonstration" remain, but the emotional dynamics of these forms of action are no longer the same. Take for example a recent issue of *Direct Action for a Non-Violent World* (April 12), published by the New England Committee for Nonviolent Action (R.F.D. 1, Box 197B, Voluntown, Connecticut 06384). The first page has photographs of demonstrations and vigils at the Sikorsky helicopter plant in Stratford, Conn. Another picture shows police jabbing their clubs at sit-in demonstrators near the capitol building at Montgomery, Alabama. Also illustrated is a seminar of high school students at Polaris Action Farm in Voluntown. An article on page four by Marjorie Swann reads as follows:

> Bob Swann was on a speaking tour in Maine recently, talking about his experiences while rebuilding churches in Mississippi, and about the New England CNVA program. A newspaper reporter in Lewiston interviewed him, and listened intently as Bob described the many facets of our work. Then the reporter asked the inevitable questions: "Where does your money come from, and what is your budget?" Bob told him our contributors provide most of our operating budget, which amounts to around $15,000 a year. The reporter burst out: "Why, that's not even equal to the salary of a junior executive! What you people could do if you *really* had some money!"
>
> I'm not sure what we would do if we "really had some money," but here is a partial list of what we have been doing lately on that less-than-a-junior-executive's salary:
>
> (1) Planned, encouraged, assisted, and/or supported more than 40 demonstrations all over the region which have protested United States military action in Vietnam, including co-sponsorship with national CNVA (Committee for NonViolent Action) of the major demonstration at the Sikorsky plant in Stratford.
>
> (2) Sent Bob Swann to Mississippi for two-and-a-half months to rebuild burned churches. Bob and Ron Moose have just returned from a one-month trip in the South with six students on their intersession period from The Meeting School of Rindge, New Hampshire—an experiment with which the school entrusted us.
>
> (3) Preparing for a seven-week Freedom and Peace Leadership Training Program to be held at the Farm from April 12 to May 29—Bradford Lyttle, Director.
>
> (4) Rebuilt and repaired several autos, so necessary to our program; remodeled facilities at the Farm to handle seminars and training programs.
>
> (5) Continued demonstrations at every launching and commissioning of Polaris submarines at Electric Boat in Groton, Connecticut.
>
> (6) Held several weekend seminars in nonviolence and work camps at the farm for high school and college students; three more planned for this spring.
>
> (7) Sent four people to Selma (Ala.) to join non-violent demonstrations there.
>
> (8) Helping Providence (R.I.) peace actionists to start an on-going study-and-action program.

Groups like this are of course always in debt. The amazing thing is how much they do with how little they have. As of the date of this issue of *Direct Action*, a letter had just come to the Farm from COFO, asking how many "scholarships" could be provided for native Mississippians to attend the spring training program on non-violence.

Actually, the support of such undertakings is a measure of the health of the social community. Conservative resources are not available for direct-action movements, nor, for that matter, for any of the efforts which are openly in behalf of a radically changed society. These have to subsist in the interstices of the culture and draw their nourishment from people without much money. So, when grass-roots movements spring up outside of conventional institutions they always live "on the country," while the old, hardening institutional structures continue as they are, slowly losing vitality and becoming increasingly immune to change.

This kind of radicalism, while it may seem almost microscopic in effect to those who don't feel its influence, works as a leaven in people's lives. It offers the example of individuals who give practically all their energies to an ideal of the common good. Those who find it difficult to understand why the "extreme" methods of civil disobedience are used by these radicals need to recognize the *extreme* situation of the modern world. People who are willing to experiment with new forms of action may be the most valuable citizens a country can have.

Another phase of the new radical movement is its continuous attempt to carry on a dialogue with thoughtful defenders of the *status quo*. For example, the April issue of *Liberation* contains an exchange of letters between A. J. Muste, one of the editors, and George F. Kennan, former Ambassador to the Soviet Union and more recently to Jugoslavia. Commenting on Kennan's article, "A Fresh Look at Our China Policy," in the New York *Times Magazine* of Nov. 2, 1964, Mr. Muste says:

> Mr. Kennan seems to justify United States policy in the situation mainly if not exclusively, on the assumption that we are entitled to "the fruits of our victory over Japan," and that we have commitments in that part of the world "with which we emerged from the Pacific war" and which we cannot run out on. But if the discussion has thus to do with power relationships and the fruits of victory in war, then it seems to me that people who emphasize political realism ought to expect the new Chinese regime, whether Communist or not, to behave just as it does, namely to strive to redress what is bound to be regarded as the unbalance in Asia, to resent the fact that Japan, which waged a brutal war against China for years, is now aided by the United States and is a heavily armed United States base to "contain" China. Political realists ought to see that the Peking regime can only regard the United States as "an imperialist warmonger," the big trouble-maker in Asia which has maintained for a decade and a half a regime on Taiwan openly committed to destroying the Chinese People's Republic. . . .
>
> Kennan cogently points out that our ability to hold the line in Southeast Asia depends on political factors, such as the support of the population, rather than on military force. But in this context he has nothing to say about the Diem regime in South Vietnam, which the U.S. kept in office for years and which it finally helped to overthrow. Nor does Kennan give any hint as to the atrocious character of the war we are waging there at this very moment.

This is only a fragment of the interchange between Mr. Muste and Mr. Kennan. It is quoted here to illustrate the radical pacifist contention that serious peace-making requires us to regard the peoples of another ideological persuasion as *human beings*. It is of course a matter of opinion whether or not the future of successful radical action lies with the believers in non-violence. Nor can these few paragraphs be regarded as in any way representative of the enormous diversity of the forces working for change in the modern world. On the other hand, a strong case can be made for the idea that only a non-violent approach to revolutionary goals is compatible with the awakening spirit of the times, and with the substance of what is to be achieved.