

## THE LAST DRAMATIC QUESTIONS

IN an essay on Prometheus, which introduces his translation of *Prometheus Bound* (University of Washington Press, 1968), Eric Havelock writes critically of the religious sort of "goodness" practiced with personal salvation in mind, contrasting it with the wide generosity of Promethean resolve. In the drama by Aeschylus, Prometheus embodies the spirit of altruism, expressed through the powers of mind. By foresight he serves the welfare of all humans. For this presumption he comes into conflict with Zeus, who in the play represents sheer theocratic power, an irrational authority which prohibits the free exercise of individual decision and imagination. Zeus insists on conformity to the sort of order he has established, and Prometheus is by nature unalterably opposed to this rule. So he is cruelly punished; although as an immortal he cannot die, the titan is doomed to suffer through the ages.

Seeking to penetrate the symbolism in this unflattering account of Zeus, who is the highest God of the Greeks, Prof. Havelock suggests that when internal discipline is put aside, with outside control taking its place, the "virtue" which belongs by right to individually regulated freedom is transferred to the habit of conformity. Then the "deity" of the people so conforming becomes like the Zeus of *Prometheus Bound*. Of such externally imposed discipline, Prof. Havelock says:

There has been a steady tendency in the West to estimate this quality as a moral virtue, to be pursued in and for itself: social discipline has been confused with self-discipline. A religious ethic, which bases itself on obedience to divine will, is partly responsible for this falsification. The chain of command and obedience, once it becomes an end in itself, conflicts with all forms of science and all processes of the imaginative intellect. The *Prometheus Bound* is a tremendous dramatization of this clash of history.

This idea, as developed by Prof. Havelock, was used in the MANAS article, "The Shadowy Terrain" (Sept. 17, 1975), and a reader familiar with Shelley's treatment of the same confrontation offered this comment:

I wish the writer had not let Eric Havelock's paragraph go by so easily, in which Havelock criticizes the religious source of ethical action as he sees it in *Prometheus Bound*. Shelley knew very well that Zeus is the enemy in the drama, but in his own poem he shows that Zeus is nothing else than the intellectual will which your author champions. The unaided intellect will always fall back upon tradition, rules, blind subservience to some creed or other, or else it will founder in despair, and the only possible grounding which can lead to the "disorderly spontaneity" we all want so badly seems to me a religious, intuitive one—a sense of belonging to the world, of some deep, mysterious relationship which Prometheus must have known and which was the source of his power and his love.

In justice to Prof. Havelock, it should be noted that he regards both Zeus and Prometheus as projections of human qualities, capacities, and powers, and of their distorted strivings as well as their high potentialities. As he puts it:

Zeus is indeed Jehovah, god of battles and a jealous god, smiter of his enemies, visiting the sins of the father on the children.

But for the dramatist, this creed of power and force is an element in man himself, which shares with his intelligence the responsibility for making his history. It is consistent with this view of Zeus that Prometheus should be able to foresee a reconciliation with his tormentor. In this he imaginatively recognizes the principle that is, historically speaking, his other half, and can look forward to the day when the two sides of man's nature will be harmonized.

One is virtually obliged to recall here a nineteenth-century version of the drama of Prometheus—Dostoevsky's Legend of the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Like Prometheus, Jesus—also a believer in freedom of

mind and human independence—becomes an intolerable threat to the established order. The returned Jesus is imprisoned by the aged Inquisitor, and reproached by the old man for His unwelcome second visit to earth. The Inquisitor makes claim to compassionate love of mankind, too, but declares that humans are weak, unable to live by the heroic standards Jesus had taught. If men are ever to gain happiness, he said, they must be carefully managed with sagacious deceptions, comforted with lies, and made to imagine themselves happy.

In Dostoevsky's tale, Ivan Karamazov has been explaining the meeting between Jesus and the Inquisitor to his brother, Alyosha, who asks how the story ends. Ivan replies:

"I meant to end it like this. When the Inquisitor ceased speaking he waited some time for his Prisoner to answer him. His silence weighed down upon him. He saw that the Prisoner had listened intently all the time, looking gently in his face and evidently not wishing to reply. The old man longed for Him to say something, however bitter and terrible. But He suddenly approached the old man in silence and softly kissed him on his bloodless aged lips. That was all his answer. The old man shuddered. His lips moved. He went to the door, opened it, and said to Him: 'Go, and come no more . . . come not at all, never, never!' And he let Him out into the dark alleys of the town. The Prisoner went away."

"And the old man?"

"The kiss glows in his heart, but the old man adheres to his idea."

Zeus will not admit the truth of Prometheus. The time is not yet.

Always, in extraordinary mythic figures, there are these puzzling dualities. Another personification of Prometheus is Lucifer, the Light-Bringer, who, cast as the Serpent in the Garden of Eden story, initiates man into the knowledge of good and evil, making him both a moral and a creative intelligence, yet causing his expulsion from the paradise of dreaming and unthinking innocence. So it is that for the Promethean spirits among men Lucifer is a figure

of the greatest fascination. In his essay on William Blake, Harold Goddard says:

Why did Milton, without intending to, make Satan a sublime and magnificent figure, and God in comparison a pale and ineffectual one? Blake's answer is the profoundest comment ever made on *Paradise Lost*. "The reason Milton wrote in letters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it."

What overtook Milton as poetic necessity inspired Hugo to portray Lucifer as a meeting-ground of the discords of earthly life with the love of a lost divinity. His struggle within himself ends with the birth of his angel daughter, Liberty, who arises as the progeny of a union between Light and Darkness, or Good and Evil. This resolution transforms him. "*Satan est mort, renais O Lucifer Celeste!*" is a closing line of the work Hugo was unable to complete.

What tortured Lucifer? The moral agony of his dual nature. Out of an ultimate despair he is at last reborn the bright god of light, just as Prometheus will one day be relieved of his shackles by Hercules, his heroic deliverer; and then Zeus, too, will be united with his former champion.

The story of Prometheus is archetypal for the heroism, vision, passion, and degradation of human life. Human greatness is almost always marked by loneliness, pain, struggle, and suffers bitter defeat. The most memorable heroes are not triumphant, but the crucified and the rejected. The spirit of one who endures against odds, who will not deny himself nor abandon what he knows—this is what we take to our hearts, even while, like the stubborn-minded inquisitor, we cling to our old ideas.

Never-ending contest seems the only alternative to the compromises of a settlement which hopes to avoid the struggle. There are continuous repetitions of the Prometheus/Zeus encounter, stepped down, secularized, sentimentalized, and even brutalized. Prometheus

represents the impulse to freedom, creation, high imagining, and dissolving compassion. He is also the craftsman's skill of knowing how to do things. But when a great idea is turned into a mode of definable action, its implications developed and technically applied, a *system* results. Consider the world as men of science view it—a mental construct made with closely integrated abstractions. Originally these abstractions, as statements of laws, were the tools which enabled us to make things work, or to see how they work. But when the abstractions do ideological service as a definition of the world, they become something very like religious dogma. They stand in the way of fresh imagining. They are necessary, yet function as intellectual and even moral barriers to further discovery.

Is there any sort of "knowledge" that doesn't have this confining result? It seems an inevitable reflex of human nature that whenever someone solves a large practical problem, a great new addition to "eternal truth" is triumphantly announced. The world, we say, will never be the same. But what, by contrast, do we mean when we speak of *maturity*? Usually, we mean little more than that the mature individual has outgrown susceptibility to such exaggerated confidences. A mature human will let no particular item of knowledge, or system of knowledge, distort the perspective which comes from awareness of an eternal progress of growth.

Prometheus, we might say, had maturity. He was also heroic, which meant that he would suffer for having vision, for insisting on living above the understanding of his times. But he did not lose his vision, his knowledge of what was to come, even if he had to lose everything else. He knew what was good about Zeus, what was wrong with him, and what, in the fullness of time, would bring the god to disaster and recreate him. But he couldn't tell Zeus this secret because, at the height of his power, Zeus was in no condition to use it. Prometheus' secret was precocious truth. Hearing

it, Zeus would have probably done some other awful thing with all that terrible power.

Zeus will finally be unthroned by his own son—by, in effect, his own doing. This is what Prometheus knew about mankind—that in them are the germs of all they need to know to recover from the rule of Zeus and to make themselves free. It may take ten thousand years, but they will learn. It is in them to learn.

What is this but the spirit of Socrates, who could not be silenced; and the spirit of Bruno, who could not be intimidated; and the spirit of all those other voices of courage and vision in later times, each with its message of awareness, its understanding of human destiny, of what the world must learn and what it must forego.

To know history, one needs to understand, not so much the consolidators of epochs, the empire-builders and makers of systems, but the creative unmakers—the great dissenters, even the great heretics. Not the rank and file of dissenters, since there is copying and imitation here, too, but the first discoverers of fresh meaning who had, in order to bring their discoveries to birth, to become breakers of molds.

Each human being is born into a world of molds, some of them firmly shaped and filled with authority. Other molds may be almost in fragments, while still others are only in formation. Growing up in such a world is a process of knowing more and more and less and less. Growing up is the sagacious relinquishment of one's illusions, and the world's—or, you could say, of one's ignorance and the world's. Which is also to say that as knowledge becomes less dictatorial or confining to the mind, it has increasing utility. And finally Zeus loses out; he is no longer in charge. The system is not the meaning of life, but its uses remain.

But what, in all this painful growing up, keeps the mind alive? What gives the Promethean spirit its awesome courage?

There are at least two answers to this question. One is that eventually the system breaks down. Prometheus knows this. Sooner or later, all systems break down. Capable of surviving are only the creators of the systems. It is as Blake put it in "There Is No Natural Religion": "Reason, the ratio of all we have already known, is not the same that it shall be when we know more." Or: "If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character the Philosophic and Experimental would soon be the ratio of all things, and stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again."

The Poetic or Prophetic component in human beings takes the deliveries of the senses, and also the hungerings of the heart—the intuitions which come from the imprisoned *Nous* within—and formulates both odes and scientific hypotheses. It erects launching platforms, circulates anthems, and composes consoling melodies which tell of rainbows behind the mist. The poetic genius, when the Socratic midwifery of an age is unschooled, awkward, and ignorant of the necessities of noetic birth, can give voice only to inchoate longings and sad cries from a captivity that makes no sense. How else shall we understand Camus when he says—

Whatever may be the plays on words and the acrobatics of logic, to understand is, above all, to unify. The mind's deepest desire, even in its most elaborate operations, parallels man's unconscious feeling in the face of his universe: it is an insistence on familiarity, an appetite for clarity. Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal.

Camus assembles the factors of frustration like a mathematician who insists on giving values to the terms of an equation he cannot solve:

I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. . . . If I were a tree among trees, a cat among animals, this life would have a meaning, or rather this problem would not arise, for I should belong to this world. I should be this world to which I am now opposed by my whole consciousness and my whole insistence upon familiarity. This ridiculous reason is what sets me in opposition to all creation. I

cannot cross it out with a stroke of the pen. What I believe to be true I must therefore preserve. What seems to me so obvious, even against me, I must support. And what constitutes the basis of that conflict, of that break between the world and my mind, but the awareness of it? If therefore I want to preserve it, I can through a constant awareness, ever revived, ever alert. This is what, for the moment, I must remember.

To be only a man, yet to feel the glow of uniting understanding—but *only* the glow; to be a man, arena of a ceaseless competition of partisan desires, of partial justifications, know only explanations which are bound to be temporary; to be a man, yet never able to rest content with being a man, having tenancy of an existence beset with heavenly longings and visions, but unable to emigrate except in dream: and this dreaming, for Camus, seemed evidence of a cosmic conspiracy. Yet the dreams would not let him submit.

Tolstoy suffered a similar agony. The world refused to live by the only vision it knew. Men ought to love one another, but instead they study the arts of war, practice the skills of tyranny, master the devices of deception. *Why?* Tolstoy knew the heart's opposing reasons and became their Orpheus; the echo of his songs is with us yet; but we remember more of his pain than his melodies. Realizing that without the pain the melodies would not ring so poignantly, we discover something about ourselves.

Is it that every timeless truth casts a shadow which is a product of time, and that these shadows harden into the stones of which men build their civilizations? Is it that poets and prophets find out this exploitation of truth and turn despairing; yet, *being* poets and prophets, they go on insisting that no shadow is ever without a light from somewhere to make its dark existence?

There are these few—we have called them poets and prophets—who wrestle with questions others hardly know how to ask. Stop all that pointless wondering! they exclaim. Can't you find something practical to do? But the poets are busy with the most practical matter they know. They

are trying to explain—to themselves if no one else will listen—certain inevitabilities of being human. There is, they discover, little but misinformation on the subject. So they are obligated to fight even with language to make it serve their well-nigh impossible purposes. Consider Kierkegaard's musings over this enormous difficulty:

Ordinary communication, like objective thinking in general, has no secrets, only a doubly reflected subjective thinking has them. That is to say, the entire essential content of subjective thought is essentially secret, because it cannot be directly communicated. This is the meaning of the secrecy. The fact that the knowledge in question does not lend itself to direct utterance, . . . makes it a secret for everyone who is not in the same way doubly reflected within himself. And the fact that this is the essential form of such truth makes it important to express it in any other manner. Hence when anyone proposes to communicate such truth directly, he proves his stupidity; and if anyone else demands this of him, he too shows that he is stupid. Over against such an elusive and artistic communication of truth, the customary human stupidity will always raise the cry that it is egoism. And when stupidity at length prevails, and the communication becomes direct, stupidity will have gained so much, that the author of the communication will have become equally stupid with the pretended recipient.

This is Kierkegaard, in effect explaining Plato's meaning in his Seventh Epistle. It is the *rationale* of not writing down what cannot be written down, what cannot be communicated directly. Yet the intimations of transcendence keep flowing in. The great questions keep on arising, and poets and prophets are a long-suffering but hardy breed. They may find it hard to give the reasons for their obscurity—their condemnation to a language made for direct communication—unfitted for their needs—but they are nonetheless able to voice undying longings, to repeat what Prometheus taught them long ago.

In Ortega's *Toward a Philosophy of History* the content is plain and unmistakable:

. . . man is practically unable, for psychological reasons, to do without all-around knowledge of the

world, without an integral idea of the universe. Crude or refined, with our consent or without it, such a trans-scientific picture of the world will settle in the mind of each of us, ruling our lives more effectively than scientific truth.

The past century, resorting to all but force, tried to restrict the human mind within the limits set to exactness. Its violent effort to turn its back on last problems is called agnosticism. But such endeavor seems neither fair nor sensible. That science is incapable of solving in its own way those fundamental questions is no sufficient reason for slighting them, as did the fox with the high-hung grapes, or for calling them myths and urging us to drop them altogether.

How can we turn a deaf ear to the last dramatic questions? Where does the world come from and whither is it going? Which is the supreme power of the cosmos, what the essential meaning of life? We cannot breathe confined to a realm of secondary and intermediate themes. We need a comprehensive perspective, foreground and background, not a maimed scenery, a horizon stripped of infinite distances. . . . Insoluble though they be, these problems will never cease to loom on the vault of the night, stirring us with their starry twinkle—the stars, according to Heine, are night's restless golden thoughts. North and South help to orient us despite their being not precisely cities to which one can buy a railroad ticket.

## *REVIEW*

### RONALD LAING, M.D.

THE best introduction to the ideas of the now famous psychiatrist, R. D. Laing, may be what he told an audience at Hunter College during a recent visit to the United States:

"I am a student of my own nature," he said. "I can only tell you how my own life has gone. It's been a very circuitous journey. I certainly would not propose it as a model for anyone else to follow. In a sense, I suppose it's just the story of a mid-twentieth-century intellectual. I suppose I'm one of the symptoms of the times. . . ."

Dr. Laing gained international attention with publication of his first book, *The Divided Self* (1960), which made it evident that his sympathies were all with the patient—too often the victim—of psychiatric treatment. Dr. Laing is undoubtedly a brilliant man, wise enough to openly admit his confusion in a time when everything is being questioned, and skillful enough to reveal his confusion in salutary and helpful ways. We first came across him in an article he wrote for *Peace News* (Dec. 16, 1964). It began:

From the moment of birth, when the stone-age baby confronts the twentieth-century mother, the baby is subjected to forces of outrageous violence, called love, as its mother and father have been, and their parents and their parents before them. These forces are mainly concerned with destroying most of its potentialities. This enterprise is on the whole successful. By the time the new human being is fifteen or so, we are left with a being like ourselves. A half-crazed creature, more or less adjusted to a mad world. This is normality in our present age.

Love and violence, properly speaking, are polar opposites. Love lets the other be, but with affection and concern. Violence attempts to constrain the other's freedom, to force him to act in the way we desire, but with ultimate lack of concern, with indifference to the other's own existence or destiny.

My theme is that we are effectively destroying ourselves by violence masquerading as love.

A man who says things like that is bound to attract attention and draw fire. One who says such things well will win admirers and also be angrily condemned. For ten years or more, Dr. Laing has

been attacking ikons, stomping on stereotypes, and practicing psychoanalysis in what seems an extraordinarily liberating way. An American psychiatrist, after visiting Dr. Laing in London in 1971, had this to say about his work:

At Kingsley Hall the barrier between the "sane" doctor and the "mad" patient was removed. In his writings, Laing, starting with an attempt to describe madness, ultimately questions the sanity of the society which erected this barrier: "A little girl of seventeen told me she was terrified because the Atom Bomb was inside her. That is a delusion. The statesmen of the world who boast and threaten that they have Domsday weapons are far more dangerous and far more estranged from 'reality' than any of the people to whom the label 'psychotic' is affixed."

Laing holds up to his readers a vision of a world in which all of us are "bemused and crazed creatures, strangers to our true selves, to one another, and to the spiritual and material world." He insists that the way out of this pervasive madness is through profound personal and social transformation.

The metanoic voyage that took place at Kingsley Hall must become possible for all who need and wish to embark upon it. Perhaps "mental hospitals," reversing history, can become ships of sanity.

In his talks with this American doctor (James S. Gordon, who reported his experience and the conversations in the *Atlantic* for January, 1971), Dr. Laing would not permit a tape to be made of what he said. He didn't want, he said, to make a "public statement." This feeling seems legitimate. While Laing writes books and submits to interviews, a man who believes that the most valuable thing he does is "from one person to another" might not feel able to get the sense of his intentions into a random comment. He was willing, however, for Dr. Gordon to write an article about *his* experiences at Kingsley Hall.

It is typical of reports about Ronald Laing that the ingredients come helter-skelter and jump all around. That is plainly the case with the book we have for review—*R. D. Laing: The Man and His Ideas* (Dutton, cloth \$12.95; paper \$3.95), a dialogue with Dr. Laing by Richard I. Evans, plus an article by Laing on schizophrenia, and a verbal portrait of him by Peter Mezan. Instead of attempting review or summary—which is wholly

impracticable—we'll quote a characterizing passage or two. In one place Laing explained the conditions under which he might agree to be a patient in a mental hospital:

I would have to have absolute guarantees that once in, I could really get out. . . . It doesn't matter who happens to be on duty. A nurse, or whoever is on duty, has the power to order an assault on my chemical system, at the very least, routinely, perhaps. I would regard it as pretty horrible if it was happening when I wanted to keep my mind clear and felt I needed all my wits about me, and they were systematically being taken away from me because it was thought not good for me to have access to my own mind, feelings, and senses.

Speaking of what patients most need, he said:

My impression, out of my years of psychiatric practice and experience, is that the main single thing that really makes a difference to people who are in a state of distress is to come across another human being who is really there, as a real presence to him. . . . You're like the ancient mariner trying to tell his story to the wedding guest, who doesn't really want to hear. If you detain him, off you go to get tranquilized, and you're in a very tight spot, indeed, a very desperate spot until all that stuff is taken away and someone says, all right, I'm leveling with you. In this space with me you've got sanctuary or asylum. I'm not going to do anything to you. You can come into my space with me if you're not too frightened, and you can walk out again if you want to. I'm not going to stop you, I might kick you out of my space if I don't want you, but you're free to come and go with me up to the distance I'm prepared to go, and here I am. One hopes there are a sprinkling of people around in every mental hospital—maybe the cleaning woman or the cook, or the superintendent—who are still just human beings.

Suddenly, there's someone there who you can see is *safe* to be with, who has no harmful intentions toward you, doesn't want to do anything to you, doesn't want to *treat* you, doesn't feel that you've got to be kept there for your own good. . . .

So we try to experiment with how *we* can, in our context be safe people for other people to meet. When we don't know people, people we've never met before, we have to show by our presence that we are not going to do anything to anybody in the name of anything.

Simplicities of this sort cannot help but do good, if only by shaking up people who have never thought about what it's like to be a patient in a mental hospital.

Mr. Mezan reports an interesting interchange between Dr. Laing and Norman Mailer. "They talked," he said, "about *karma*, the transmigration of souls, the doctrine that our actions in one life affect the next." Mailer said it was "the only hypothesis that explains anything":

"So long as we assume that when we die there is no hereafter, no eschatology, that we're neither rewarded nor punished, then I think we just run into one philosophical impasse after another. Human nature becomes absolutely impossible to describe in any way at all."

Laing said that to him lives are just a succession of illusions: "For quite sustained periods of time, I've had the experience, which I simply report as another experience, that my experience of myself was an illusion." Asked about making "political judgments," he said to a radical activist:

There used to be an old liberal dictum that what is politically right cannot be morally wrong. Well, I don't believe that. A political judgment is concerned only with power—how to acquire it, how to maintain it, and how to enhance it once one's got it. The right political judgment is the judgment that enhances your power and diminishes the next person's. In that sense, whether a war is justifiable or not depends purely on the political parameters—your power and their power—to be resorted to only if you think you can win. . . .

Asked how we are going to deal with power, he said:

By working from inside existing institutions and building counter-institutions, by propagandizing the idea that politics isn't mystical, that technology isn't mystifying. . . . I don't see any way whereby one can take power without overpowering the people who have it with more power. So by the same token that one judges their power to be evil, ours would be a greater evil. And I don't think it's a matter of opinion. I think it's a mathematical certainty. . . .

There's more along this line—Dr. Laing's contribution to "revolutionary" thinking.

**COMMENTARY**  
**BEYOND THE ABSURD**

IT was the lot of Prometheus before his liberation—in Shelley's poem—"To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite," yet he was able

To love and bear; to hope till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates.

The life of Albert Camus, until suddenly ended by a machine, seemed an unceasing struggle of Hope to create its object, but in a field from which the materials of creation had been removed. His was a nadir of Promethean woe, yet even the fabric of his despair was woven with threads of hope. His logical denials of hope, his declarations of absurdity, are too persistent to be read as only despair. Would not a true despair have remained silent? The Greeks, he said, knew despair, but made its expressions beautiful and tragic. "Our time, on the other hand, has fed its despair on ugliness and convulsions." By a light from beyond the realm of the Absurd, he said in "Helen's Exile,"

We have preferred the power that apes greatness, first Alexander and then the Roman conquerors whom the authors of our textbooks, through some incomparable vulgarity, teach us to admire. We, too, have conquered, moved boundaries, mastered heaven and earth. Our reason has driven all away. Alone at last, we end up by ruling over a desert. What imagination could we have left for that higher equilibrium in which nature balanced history, beauty, virtue, and which applied the music of numbers even to blood-tragedy? We turn our backs on nature; we are ashamed of beauty. Our wretched tragedies have a smell of the office clinging to them, and the blood that trickles from them is the color of printer's ink.

Fated to live in a world that had outlawed the sources of meaning, he could affirm only his rejection of the result:

Whereas the Greeks gave to will the boundaries of reason, we have come to put the will's impulse in the very center of reason, which has, as a result, become deadly. For the Greeks, values pre-existed all action, of which they definitely set the limits. Modern philosophy places its values at the end of action. They *are* not but *are becoming* and we shall

know them fully only at the completion of history. . . . our era . . . wants to transfigure the world before having exhausted it, to set it to rights before having understood it.

Camus would not pretend to understand the world; *hubris* was not his offense; but he never gave up trying to understand it.

# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### SPONTANEOUS PUBLISHING

THERE is a lot of information on how bad cities and their institutions are for the young, and how much worse they are likely to become. People need to keep track of these things—or, if you live in a city, endure them—but there is an equal or greater obligation to realize that in any situation, no matter how bad, an active imagination can always make things better for the children. A San Francisco teacher, Ron Jones, found this out and decided to demonstrate it. He tells the story in *New Schools Exchange Newsletter* for Dec. 15, 1975:

In the fall of 1972 I completed work on a textbook that was to be called *Your City Has Been Kidnapped*. Teachers children, and friends all helped in this venture. It was a delightful workbook depicting ways to see and investigate a city. It wasn't a big book. And it was of little concern to schools of education, professional groups or commercial publishers. But it was an important book because it became the responsibility and creation of the people that used it.

What's *Your City* like? Unless you're used to this sort of thing, it may be confusing. The book is large—10½" x 12"—and has sixty-four pages of handwritten text (you can read it) and many drawings and photographs. The idea is to get a youngster to look around at the city he lives in with fresh, inventive eyes. We tried it out on a friend who taught grade school children for many years, and she said they would like it—that the book would work, or could be made to work by a good teacher.

There's not much order in it; apparently there isn't meant to be. But this doesn't seem to matter since it gives an atmosphere of surprise. Under a photograph of a few columns of Egyptian hieroglyphics there is this "caption":

what rules do you encounter in the street buildings, parks, and institutions of your city?  
who makes these rules?  
who benefits from these rules?  
what unwritten rules exist in your city?

On one of the first pages is a sort of project:

*within your city TRY FINDING*

something that looks like you  
something soft  
a relic of the past  
something scary  
a secret  
a hiding place  
something free  
patriotism  
an omen of the future  
magic  
something enticing  
solitude  
something rotten  
a moral  
a place that attracts or repels you  
a place to sit  
something racist  
something that can't be photographed  
the texture or grain of your city

*what do you SEE in the city around you?*

what words do you associate with city scenes and events?  
what do you look at with pleasure, and what do you ignore?

how does your vision of the city influence your feelings?

Such questions could lead almost anywhere. They led us to recollecting a passage in Robert Jay Wolff's *On Art and Learning* (a book of lectures to future art teachers). In a chapter headed "The World Outside," Wolff says:

You might start by telling them that you can't begin to draw or paint or build or design until you've learned to look at things; and not only that, but to really see the things you look at. You can ask certain challenging questions at this point. Anyone would recognize, for example, the house across the street from his own home. He sees it every morning on his way to work. He knows the people who live in it and he's probably been in and out of it dozens of times. . . . Is it a frame or a brick house? What color is it? Are the windows big or little? Does the roof slope steeply or gently, or is it flat? Are there any trees? How many? How big are they? Are they as tall as the house or taller?

Keep on asking questions, and the children will begin to get vague. Then, as Wolff says:

You have here, already, a situation in which most of your class will want to get outside, not necessarily to seek artistic vistas, but simply to prove to themselves that they are not as blind as they have made themselves seem. Do not try to arouse them visually with reference to the beautiful, the unusual, or the sensational. Your first purpose is to sharpen visual acuity rather than to manufacture special visual interests. For the most part

your students will come to you with pretty set ideas as to what is worth looking at and what is not, especially so far as application to art is concerned. . . . They will expect you to be partial to those aspects of nature which you as an expert in matters of art supposedly will want to fit into the expected pattern. You can dissipate this predisposition for visual preciousness by the kind of down-to-earth visual challenge we have been speaking of.

The two exercises (Jones's and Wolff's) are not dissimilar and up to a point have related goals. They help people to look around them with open, curious eyes. They break up the habit of indifference toward the familiar. Wolff's project is *aimed*, but Jones intends simply to stimulate the powers of association so that better seeing will result in discovery of new relationships and possibilities everywhere one goes. Both exercises are meant to awaken the imagination, to set it free; the foci are different at the beginning, that's all. A focus on something concrete is good to start with, no matter where things are expected to end up. A specific focus has evocative power.

The child's imagination is stirred into action by a series of questions at the end of *Your City Has Been Kidnapped*:

WHAT IF . . . ?

- Buildings in your city were twice as far apart as they are now, or twice as close together . . .
- Things on top of the land were placed under the surface . . .
- Gravity did not exist, or could be selectively controlled . . .
- Large institutions became small enterprises . . .
- People shared resources and talents . . .
- Streets became gardens . . .

H.G. Wells wrote a short story—"The Man Who Could Perform Miracles"—involving something like messing with gravity, and what happened as a result. Some architects dream of whole cities placed under the ground. People who wonder about such possibilities sometimes do splendid things with their ideas. Even if they live in dirty old cities. Here and there are some lovely cities—or parts of cities—with interesting reasons for why they are beautiful, or have been made beautiful, or are being improved as, say, Vienna, is now being improved after being almost spoiled.

How did Ron Jones happen to write a book like *Your City* and then begin a "spontaneous" publishing company that now supplies a lot of teachers with materials?

This thing called Zephyros started three years ago. It came about out of my frustration with textbook publishers, schools of education, and professional organizations. Like the tooth paste vendors that came before them, the big three of education were selling things I didn't want or need. The teachers' organizations were selling credit, tires, and trips to Las Vegas. Schools of education were hawking the latest learning theory. Corporate publishers were selling old books with new covers. All this activity didn't help life in the classroom.

So he became an author and a publisher, and presto! Once in print he won plaudits for what before gained only indifference or sneers. Enlisting a bunch of teacher-volunteers, he began to publish educational materials that had been tested in his and other classrooms, sent out samples, got subscribers, and then twice a year sent the subscribers boxes of stuff they could use. He now likes the idea of spontaneous publishing, which reveals—

The power of a person who gets an idea to imply publish it as a one-time statement, and then send it to all his friends. This means that if you were teaching and developed a play, you might print it and make it available to anyone interested in your work. If large numbers of the general public became their own media, the exchange of ideas would be very exciting.

There it is again, that creeping populism, that faith in people charting their own destiny, that stubborn independence. Yes, I think you and I can write our own textbooks, maintain exchanges, press our own records, open our own stores and in general reclaim life from the franchise kinds. Yes, we can learn to cooperate rather than compete and we can trust and support each other. Yes, it sure beats watching television.

Zephyros has a catalog—write for it to Ron Jones, 1201 Stanyan Street, San Francisco, Calif. 94117. (*Your City Has Been Kidnapped* is \$1.50.)

He finishes his article in the *Newsletter* by telling about some children's stories written in Spanish by Ernesto Galarza. They are available at cost to people who like the idea of small-scale spontaneous publishing. Write Dr. Galarza at 1031 Frangette Ave., San Jose, Calif. 95125.

## *FRONTIERS* Black Scholarship

IN an ideal society there would probably be little need for a journal like *The Black Scholar*. Scholarship, like the pursuit of truth, is a high human undertaking, and differences of race, save as they represent the various riches and resources of mankind, are matters of detail. But in a period like the present, when the world has been caned up like a Sunday dinner to be enjoyed by a dominant racial group, it becomes necessary for oppressed peoples to have distinctive spokesmen. One sees the importance of this simply by dipping into *The Black Scholar* from time to time.

There are four fruitful discussions in the November 1975 issue: a consideration of the effects of urban renewal on black people; an examination of "Racism without Racists" in the public schools; an analysis of the fiscal breakdown of New York City and the consequences for blacks and other nonwhites of the stopgap solution; and, finally, an explanation (in an interview with him) of why Arthur Ashe, the black tennis champion, decided to play matches in South Africa, and what he accomplished in this way.

These *Black Scholar* articles reveal intensity of purpose against a background of cosmopolitan understanding, but no rancor. The harsh realities come out nonetheless clearly. Urban renewal, for example, whatever its limited advantages, usually displaces black people from their homes, since they live mostly in blighted areas. Often they can't afford to live in the "renewed" section. The renewal usually proceeds piecemeal, which means that black communities within the city are chopped up and left in fragments—as "discontinuous black enclaves." This weakens the black community politically and in other ways. When their neighborhoods are thus torn apart, black people become more dependent than ever "upon whites for money, income and credit." The writers of this article, Lenwood G. Davis and Winston Van Horne, say:

We cannot over-emphasize the misfortune of this development for black people, because the form of the market economy is such that one who is wholly dependent upon another for his sustenance cedes away the autonomy of his will. Put differently, the renewal of the city threatens what little autonomy black people who now live in the inner city have over their own lives.

This is a sort of pain that is seldom thought of unless it is personally experienced. It is enough by itself to justify a very different approach to urban renewal.

The article, "Racism without Racists," is a study of schools in San Francisco. It was found that "teachers are now expressing warmth toward black students, but are not accompanying their friendliness with challenging academic standards." The writers call this "institutional racism," which in subtle ways reduces the opportunity for education. "High standards for effort were not being communicated." The low achievers, "particularly black students, were allowed to delude themselves." Commenting, the writers say:

The high school teachers are in a tremendous dilemma. They are asked to teach a prescribed curriculum within each hour. But many of their students cannot even read their books, much less perform their assignments. We have discovered how many teachers adapt to this difficult situation! They adapt by being "nice" to the students because the task of assigning appropriate work (work that is challenging but not out of reach) is too difficult under the constraints of the present system. Teachers are aware of these constraints and lower their expectations for black achievement accordingly. Consequently, the teachers perpetuate institutional discrimination without acting in ways that are considered racist by the students or themselves. Many simply feel that they are personally incapable of changing the situation.

William W. Sales, Jr., after a review of the factors behind New York's financial debacle, shows that the blacks and other racial minorities are the principal sufferers from the cutbacks and economies that the city has been obliged to institute. Ghetto schools have been hardest hit, while many blacks and Puerto Ricans will either

lose their jobs or work at reduced pay. There is this ominous note in the conclusion:

The significant feature of the City's crisis is the domino effect that it will have on the American economy through the accentuation of the liquidity crisis facing the American banking system. Already it has undermined not only the market for New York notes and bonds, but has destroyed the municipal bond market generally. New York's fiscal crisis is rapidly generalizing to all of urban America.

Arthur Ashe, now recognized as one of the best tennis players in the United States, tells his interviewer that in his opinion an athlete's refusal to compete in matches in South Africa, as part of a policy isolating that country in various ways, will only strengthen apartheid:

I would like to flood South Africa with black personages of all sorts and persuasions: writers, educators, businessmen you name it. If you are black and have any clout at all, I would like to see you go to South Africa and look for yourself and come back and try to use the tools that you have at your command to try to help the brothers down there.

The biggest danger that people like myself who manage to come down, the biggest danger that you could find yourself in is that we black Americans or black Englishmen or just black people in general interested in the problems of black Africans would come to the conclusion that we could think for the blacks of Africa. The black South Africans know best how to rectify their situation and if you want to help please do so, but take your instruction from them; that is, let them tell us how to best help them.

It seems to me that every black South African in South Africa, of all persuasions, definitely wants to see more non-South African blacks come to the country and expose the myths which they have to live under every day. That is the myth that if one is white, one is naturally superior. You can explode that myth every day.

Asked about similarities between South Africa and America, Ashe said:

I don't think the same approach will be taken because [in America] the key to it for me was the 1954 Supreme Court Decision. When the Supreme Court came out with that decision it was the same as saying that inherent in our Constitution all along was the theory that we are all equal. That is not inherent

in the Constitution of South Africa. Inherent in the Constitution of South Africa is that we are not equal, that is the foundation upon which South Africa is built. . . . And that is why I think blacks who are exceptional in whatever areas should go down there to let those black South Africans know that, no, we can do a hell of a lot more than carry wood and till the soil and it explodes that myth. We have to bust the myth up, that's what it really amounts to.

This may not be the only way to wear away at ignorance and prejudice, but it may be the most persuasive, and the least costly in human pain.

*The Black Scholar* comes out ten times a year. Subscription is \$12.00. The address is Box 908, Sausalito, Calif. 94965