

TENSION AND DISSENT

WHERE do you start in thinking about human beings and their increasingly unlovely ways? With atoms and the void? With old bones found in the geological layers of a gorge in Africa? With the behavior patterns of rats in a maze or chimpanzees in a lab? Or do you examine what you think about yourself, and ask the most remarkable men you know about, or have read about, for their views concerning themselves and others?

I, declared Ortega, am myself and my circumstances. This seems a necessary supplement to the idea of the self, for what could you say about a self without any circumstances? Circumstances are what we cope with; they make the grid in which we have relationships; and for some people, how we alter or improve our circumstances gives the measure of our achievement. The earth and its various inhabitants, including "other people," provide the raw material for satisfying our wants.

But then, from time to time, what we do or have done has the effect of making us sick. We acquire dull suspicions about ourselves. What kind of "self-knowledge" is this? Does a muskrat feel guilt? Are such responses no more than symptoms of our hangover from theological myths? In *Harper's* for last December Peter Marin, one of the more articulate among the writers now inviting attention to such questions, discussed the feelings of guilt Americans are suffering in relation to the Vietnam War—or are not suffering, as the case may be. We ought, he says, to listen to the veterans. We don't *want* to listen to them—we'd rather forget the whole thing—but we may *need* to listen to them, and to accept the guilt, our share of it, for what they feel. How else can we find out more about ourselves? If pain is a warning given by nature—an indication of something in us, in our bodies or our minds, that is out of key, that is going wrong—then the

pain of guilt is not something we should run away from. And the guilt of that war belongs in a special way to the veterans. They, Peter Marin says, "are its keepers."

I do not mean of its statistics, or of the analysis of its causes or the particulars of blame; these will be pursued by others, scholars who come later, dissecting the war, laying out its details at a safe distance. But the nature of the war, and the fact and feel of it—the conflicts and private struggles, the horrors that exist simultaneously outside and inside a man—all of these belong to the vets, for who else has it in their power to keep us straight, and who else has the knowledge required to do it?

Well, people have their feelings, and the learned have their theories about the feelings. Marin tells a not untypical story:

I remember a few years ago in Michigan, accompanying a woman to a graduate seminar in psychology given by a friend of hers. The students were supposed to be discussing conscience and ethics, but they were not up to it. They were young, inexperienced, over-schooled. All value, they kept insisting, was relative, arbitrary; truth was what anyone believed it was; were we, asked one or two, to say the Germans ought not to have killed the Jews? It must have seemed right at the time.

Only one man among them was different. Black, older than the rest, he had been in Vietnam. Reluctantly, only because I asked, he described his experiences there: how he had awakened one morning after months of combat, weeping and shivering, unable to continue, frightened and ashamed of the killing he had done, full of self-hatred. Those in the room fell silent suddenly. But they were not up to it; they had to evade it. "Just shell shock," the army doctors had told the vet, and now the students had a similar explanation. "Conditioning," they said—that was all. First taught not to kill, then asked to kill, he had been caught between two arbitrary orders.

A nice, technical explanation. No problem. We confused you, and now you'll be able to work things out. Right? Don't bother to read Eschylus

or Sophocles. We understand these things now, and those old dramas have no real point. There are no mysteries of human nature, just a lot of "conditioning" we have to put behind us. But Peter Marin has another tale:

I remember, for instance, one veteran's story about his return to the States. He had been a part of what he called an "assassination squad," spending long periods of time on his own, out of touch with both his superiors and comrades, apparently working independently on his assigned tasks. He described coming home in a series of almost surrealistic vignettes: being lectured in the airport by an officer for playing cards with his buddies and "giving the service a bad name"; being asked by the first civilian he had met in months about "them niggers in the army, the ones too chicken-shit to fight"; falling asleep in his seat and then waking from a nightmare of war, shaking and sweating, to find that everyone close to him had moved several seats away; and, finally, meeting his parents at the airport and finding it impossible to speak. They drove home in silence and then sat together in the kitchen, and his mother, in passing, apologized for there being "nothing in the house to eat." That did it; he broke. Raging, he went from cupboard to cupboard, shelf to shelf, flinging doors open, pulling down cans and boxes and bags, piling them higher and higher on the table until they spilled over onto the floor and everything edible in the house was spread out in front of them.

"I couldn't believe it," he said, shaking his head as he told me. "I'd been over there for years killing those poor bastards who were living in their tunnels like rats and had nothing to eat but mud and a few goddamn moldy grains of rice, and who watched their kids starve to death or go up in smoke, and she said *nothing to eat*, and I ended up in the kitchen crying and shouting: *Nothing to eat, nothing to eat!*"

What led to this explosion? More "conditioning"? How shall we understand a culture or civilization where such responses to what may eventually be everyday experiences come to be handled as matters of routine? What symmetries are being constantly pulled out of shape? What is the role of human beings who see and feel what Peter Marin sees and feels? Is there, really, any acceptable conclusion which differs substantially from the one he reaches?

The real issue, to put it bluntly, is *guilt*: how, as a nation and as individuals, we perceive our culpability and determine what it requires of us. We must concern ourselves with the discovery of fact, the location of responsibility, the discussion of causes, the acknowledgement of moral debt and how it might be repaid—not in terms of who supposedly led us astray, but in terms of how each one of us may have contributed to the war or to its underlying causes. The "horror" of war is really very easy to confront; it demands nothing of us save the capacity not to flinch. But guilt and responsibility, if one takes them seriously, are something else altogether. For they imply a debt, something to be done, changed lives—and that is much harder on both individuals and a nation, for it implies a moral labor as strenuous and demanding as the war that preceded it.

In short, we are called by the spur of moral pain to undertake the re-creation of our common ways, to change our goals and hopes, to evolve social relationships which would make wars like Vietnam—or any modern war—not only impossible but unthinkable. That would be the best reparation, if not the full repayment of our debts. But we need to stop right here and take note of the fact that *nations* do not, and have never been known to, undertake "moral labors." The grammar of the national interest knows no way of pursuing "moral" objectives, save in the shallow rhetoric of diplomacy. That is the one thing nations are incapable of, and consistent with this impossibility is the separation of church and state that people with some understanding of human freedom insist upon. There are certain things the State cannot do, neither well nor at all, and one of them is to define morality, the truth, and the good. The vulgar definitions made by statist thinking invariably become prisons of the mind. Morality is forever and always an individual enterprise, and when the State's presumptuous definitions of morality are allowed to control behavior, true morality has been replaced by the goals of power and the skills of technique.

It follows that, in any modern state, if there is vital morality there is tension and dissent. The good society, in other words, is not a blessed unity of concerted purposes, all pulling together,

but a society which, for its own good, sets out to endure serious and sometimes far-reaching dissent. Only a vigorous morality of individuals has the power to keep the state in line, oblige it to conform to elementary decencies, which is about all it is capable of, anyway. Which is to say that a moral people will need and permit only a very weak state.

When morality is redefined by the state in collusion with the acquisitive interests of industry and commerce, the tension goes, except as found in reduced condition in individuals, to burst out, on occasion—on *terrible* occasion—as in the case of the Vietnam veteran. A society which lacks this tension as a normal element in social life is a society that has lost its ensouling humanity—a condition soon reflected not only in wars which make criminals of both soldiers and civilians, but in literature and the arts. The individual expression of the arts is homogenized and converted into "products" which are marketed like gourmet items in the supermarkets. The Great Refusal spoken of by Herbert Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man* is neutralized and absorbed as part of the system. As he says:

The works of alienation are themselves incorporated into this society and circulate as part and parcel of the equipment which adorns and psychoanalyzes the prevailing state of affairs. Thus they become commercials—they sell, comfort, or excite.

The neo-conservative critics of leftist critics of mass culture ridicule the protest against Bach as background music in the kitchen, against Plato and Hegel, Shelley and Baudelaire, Marx and Freud in the drugstore. Instead, they insist on recognition of the fact that the classics have left the mausoleum and come to life again, that people are just so much more educated. True, but coming to life as classics, they come to life as other than themselves; they are deprived of their antagonistic force, of the estrangement which was the very dimension of their truth. The intent and function of these works have thus fundamentally changed. If they once stood in contradiction to the status quo, this contradiction is now flattened out.

What happens when the moral tensions maintained by determined individuals become weak or are isolated and driven underground? One thing that happens is that our everyday language—the language we read in the papers—becomes oxymoronic. (An oxymoron is "a combination of contradictory or incongruous words (as *cruel kindness*).") Writing in 1964, Marcuse said:

I shall attempt to show that the "clean bomb" and the "harmless fall-out" are only the extreme creations of a normal style. Once considered the principal offense against logic, the contradiction now appears as a principle of the logic of manipulation—realistic caricature of dialectics. It is the logic of a society which can afford to dispense with logic and play with destruction, a society with technological mastery of mind and matter.

The universe of discourse in which the opposites are reconciled has a firm basis for such unification—its beneficial destructiveness. Total commercialization joins formerly antagonistic spheres of life, and this union expresses itself in the smooth linguistic conjunction of conflicting parts of speech. To a mind not yet sufficiently conditioned, much of the public speaking and printing appears utterly surrealistic. Captions such as "Labor is Seeking Missile Harmony," and advertisements such as a "Luxury Fall-Out Shelter" may still evoke the naive reaction that "Labor," "Missile," and "Harmony" are irreconcilable contradictions, and that no logic and no language should be capable of correctly joining luxury and fall-out. However, the logic and the language become perfectly rational when we learn that a "nuclear-powered, ballistic-missile-firing submarine" "carries a price tag of \$120,000,000" and that "carpeting, scrabble and TV" are provided in the \$1,000 model of the shelter. The validation is not primarily in the fact that this language sells (it seems that the fall-out business was not so good) but rather that it promotes the immediate identification of the particular with the general interest, Business with National Power prosperity with the annihilation potential. It is only a slip of the truth if a theater announces as a "Special Election Eve Perf., Strindberg's *Dance of Death*."

Or, as Peter Marin says:

In a way, few of the men who fought in Vietnam were ever really there, ever really saw the place and their enemies. They were locked still, in our

classrooms, in our national dreams, in our old Hollywood films, living out, almost like robots, the pervasive national myths of virtue, prowess, and powers. . . .

But the obscene reality of the war got through to many. It was like "a perpetual Halloween night grown brutally real," Marin says. The soldiers "were like grown children in the wrong place, always in someone else's garden, ready to fire or flee in an instant." Then there was the omnipresent corruption:

"I was from the city streets," a young man said to me "and so I was used to it all—the graft, the theft, the crooked authority. I knew all about American corruption. But the farm kids! Christ, when they saw all that, it damn near blew them away. It was worse than combat, to see their own country's shabbiness.

What has Peter Marin to suggest? Toward the end of his article he says:

I am not arguing here for a pure pacifism—though given the human capacity for error there is an argument to be made on that count. What I *am* arguing for here is simply the minimum moral ground for any just society: the willingness of all men and women to accept absolute responsibility for the nature of their acts and their consequences, especially in those matters involving others and life and death. It is individual judgment, choice, and responsibility that leaven and define the nature of the shared moral life. Nations and national leaders must be constrained and circumscribed by ethical standards passionately maintained by every private citizen: the capacity to see others clearly, to understand the relationship of one's life to theirs, and to judge the demands of the state and resist its power and propaganda in accordance with one's best and private sense of justice.

It has fallen to the vets to remind us of this, and what we owe them in return is everything we can do to make that task easier. This includes not only a willingness to consider the war itself and our own culpability, but also a willingness to begin the re-examination and re-creation of the debauched moral landscape in which their struggles occur.

Here surely, is the heart of the matter. Only "individual judgment, choice, and responsibility" are *able* to recreate "the debauched moral landscape of the present." The first thing, then, to

do is to recover a sense of *competence* in individual judgment and choice, while thinking about the ranges of responsibility. And we must neither do too little nor expect too much. Pragmatic America has a population of impatient moralists, with the promise of "instant" this and "instant" that drilled into us from the cradle. We need the perspective of history in order to learn patience with the processes of individual change.

Courage as well as competence will be required, and if we look back into the past for examples, we find that every distinctive civilization that we know something about has had its heroic voices of dissent. They are the ones to study, to read and assimilate, if we want some help in understanding and dealing with the present. We need to look for examples of the sort of moral tensions we must now attempt to create. In ancient Athens, we find Socrates—Socrates and Plato—who took the stance of the responsible individual and made something of a glory of his defeat. What was the defeat of Socrates? Not that the crowd, angered by his moral integrity and his way of calling people to account, decided to execute him, but that the city that he loved remained in decline.

Was this really failure and defeat, or was it simply par for the historical course, all that was possible at the time? What do we know of the individual victories in the lives of Athenians—and of individuals who, during the two thousand and some years since, performed re-creation of themselves after a Socratic inspiration? Where are the fruits of such progress stored? Socrates had his view of this matter, but it is not, or has not been, ours.

If we determine to study history for light on the present, what or whom should we select as fruitful for our problems? The empire builders or the great protesters? The pillars of orthodoxy or the heretics—those who make their own choices? Thomas More makes better reading than Henry VIII. It is better to study Pico della Mirandola on the Dignity of Man than to read Lorenzo,

however magnificent. Bruno is more important to know than the regulations of the Holy Office. Spain had Cervantes at the same time, and centuries later there was Ortega y Gasset. Whom shall we choose in France? Only Simone Weil comes to mind, but the purity and strength of her contribution make up for lack of numbers. Italy now has Danilo Dolci, still a man in his prime, known as the Italian Gandhi. America has had Paine and Lincoln, and Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau—we are particularly rich in the heritage of tensions from them. An English contemporary of Paine was William Blake, whose protest was a celebration from beginning to end. Russia had Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, then Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn, and India has had Gandhi.

There will be others, perhaps, in America and elsewhere before too long. The invitation to a heroic breed grows stronger every day. Meanwhile there will be value in learning what are the real tensions—the moral issues created by the great civilizers, the true humanists—and how they emerge in the circumstances of life.

REVIEW

A CONCEPT OF HISTORY

IN *The Necessity for Ruins* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1980) J. B. Jackson, who was editor and publisher of the magazine *Landscape* from 1952 to 1968, tells in the first chapter about his embarrassment in not being able to explain briefly why study of the cultural landscape is a good thing to do.

The more I sought some justification for discussing the cultural landscape at such length, the more convinced I was that the course had little practical or scholarly value. So my contribution to the education of my students was simply this: I taught them how to be alert and enthusiastic tourists.

An embarrassing kind of insight! For I was well aware of the low reputation tourists enjoyed all over the world, and in fact I had gone out of my way to denounce the tourist industry as the exploiter and defiler of landscapes. But I was also aware of the fact that what I had tried to share with students was precisely the pleasure and inspiration I myself had acquired not from books, not from college, but from many years of travel. What I was passing on were those experiences as a tourist—or the means of acquiring them—that had been most precious to me.

While this gentle apology may be of interest, the book itself soon disperses any doubts that it is worth reading. Mr. Jackson finds engaging substance in anything he writes about, and his purpose, seldom didactically in the foreground, is to stir reflection about how the world around us is to such a large extent a world we have made ourselves, and how it reflects ourselves. The title essay is concerned with the human longing, at times greatly intensified, to go back to our beginnings and start afresh. The "ruins" are reminders of what we have lost, of excellences we no longer know how to produce. They may say to us that we once had a past that was better than the present. In short, knowledge of the cultural landscape becomes a path to a true sense of history.

Some closing paragraphs from this chapter will show what Mr. Jackson makes of this:

It seems clear that the whole preservation and restoration movement is much more than a means of promoting tourism or a sentimentalizing over an obscure part of the past—though it is also both of those things. We are learning to see it as a new (or recently discovered) interpretation of history. It sees history not as a continuity but as a dramatic discontinuity, a kind of cosmic drama. First there is that golden age, the time of harmonious beginnings. Then ensues a period when the old days are forgotten and the golden age falls into neglect. Finally comes a time when we rediscover and seek to restore the world around us to something like its former beauty.

But there has to be that interval of neglect, there has to be discontinuity; it is religiously and artistically essential. That is what I mean when I refer to the necessity for ruins: ruins provide the incentive for restoration, and for a return to origins. There has to be (in our new concept of history) an interim of death or rejection before there can be renewal and reform. The old order has to die before there can be a born-again landscape. Many of us know the joy and excitement not so much of creating the new as of redeeming what has been neglected, and this excitement is particularly strong when the original condition is seen as holy or beautiful. The old farmhouse has to decay before we can restore it and lead an alternative life style in the country; the landscape has to be plundered and stripped before we can restore the natural ecosystem; the neighborhood has to be a slum before we can rediscover it and gentrify it. That is how we reproduce the cosmic scheme and correct history.

It is an old, old story, going back to the Garden of Eden. We become human by eating the apple, providing knowledge of good by acquainting us with evil, and being so initiated we were launched on the human enterprise. The mariner needed to kill the albatross in order to gain moral awareness and the prodigal son would be of no interest at all if he hadn't gone out on the town.

The story of America's prodigal years is inscribed in our buildings, our towns and cities. Mr. Jackson quotes a famous American architect, Leopold Eidlitz, who wrote more than eighty years ago:

We are busy improving the material conditions of mankind and are apt to look upon ethical relations

not so much as paramount in themselves but as adjuncts to material well-being. The priest and the soldier no longer govern the world. They are relegated to positions of servants of the people, and the merchant, the manufacturer, the builder of railroads and ships . . . have taken the place of kings, bishops, and generals. . . . The majority of buildings which command the attention and services of the architect at the present time and in this country are strictly business buildings . . . railroad stations, insurance and office buildings, stores and new offices. . . . Of course we build courts of justice and capitols; they . . . represent vital social and political ideas. . . . But these ideas have been deprived of their poetry. . . . A judge no longer performs the functions inherent in his office in the past, he has sunk down into a referee who decides upon the cogency of contending lawyers. . . . Hence it is a fact that a courtroom is nothing more than a convenient apartment for legal discussion and a number of such apartments are habitually packed into a rectangular structure which can in no way be distinguished from surrounding business buildings.

We are gradually becoming aware of what it means to live in a country which has no hallowed places, no sanctified times. Holidays are moved around to suit industrial convenience and merchandising opportunity. The same thing has happened to our heroes. We still have the habit of honoring them, but little sense of why. As J. B. Jackson says:

. . . something more than disillusionment with established heroes accounts for the change in our attitude toward monuments, and one of the most revealing episodes in recent history occurred a few decades ago when there was a question of honoring Thomas Jefferson and later of honoring Franklin Delano Roosevelt. At the time it was generally agreed that each of them deserved a monument in Washington. But the debate as to the *kind* of monument revealed that few had any clear idea of the traditional monument or of the purpose it served. Artists and critics argued as to the appropriateness of each style: classical or contemporary? Simple or ornate? There were liberals who said (as they always say on such occasions), why spend so much money on a pretentious building with no practical use when the same amount of money could provide several places of public recreation? And most significantly a number of prominent architects and designers publicly admitted that they did not know *how* to

design a monument. They were not ashamed of this deficiency; on the contrary, they offered it as evidence that they were down-to-earth, practical men, impatient with worn-out tradition.

Two other books kept coming to mind as we read *The Necessity for Ruins*. So after finishing—but only the first reading—Mr. Jackson's book we got the others down from the shelf. One was *Architecture without Architects* by Bernard Rudofsky (Doubleday, 1964), the other, *Matrix of Man* by Sibyl Moholy-Nagy (Praeger, 1968). These are writers who, along with Mr. Jackson, want to give our civilization and culture back to ourselves—to put it under the right management, so to speak. Rudofsky says in his introduction:

There is much to learn from architecture before it became an expert's art. The untutored builders in time and space—the protagonists of this show—demonstrate an admirable talent for fitting their buildings into the natural surroundings. Instead of trying to "conquer" nature, as we do, they welcome the vagaries of climate and the challenge of topography. Whereas we find flat, featureless country most to our liking (any flaws in the terrain are easily erased by the application of a bulldozer), more sophisticated people are attracted by rugged country. In fact, they do not hesitate to seek out the most complicated configurations in the landscape. The most sanguine of them have been known to choose veritable eyries for their building sites—Machu Picchu, Monte Alban, the craggy bastions of the monks' republic on Mount Athos, to mention only some familiar ones.

Needless to say, *Architecture without Architects* is a treasured picture book. (It is the record of a great photographic exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art.)

Because of the Iraq-Iran war, Baghdad, capital of Iraq, has lately been in the news. *Matrix of Man* tells about the origins of this place.

The circular capital Baghdad, which the Abbasid Dynasty laid out in 762 near the ruined Hellenistic and Seleucid cities of Mesopotamia, was as utopian an experiment in "scientific order" as Le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse* in our time.

The city as concentric world mountain had thrust man into the company of his divine superimage

in a fixed, static relationship. The power symbol was absolute and immutable. The astrologically interpreted astronomy of the medieval Arabs modified religion through science for the first time in human history. They founded Baghdad as a zodiac, oriented within the astrolabic circle, which would reflect the impartial order of celestial law rather than be at the mercy of whimsical deities.

Of the Arabs who chose this design for their city, Sibyl Moholy-Nagy says:

The Abbassid caliphs must be counted among the exceedingly rare rulers who saved man's cultural achievements by protecting scholars and artists, and who increased the imperishable values that justify human existence by subsidizing creative talent. Arab scientists produced workable astronomical instruments, the astrolabe and the alidade, permitting the measurement of celestial distances. They also developed Greek mathematics into systems with transmissible symbols. The great mathematician of the Baghdad school, al-Khwarizmi, who in the ninth century gave algebra its name, its first textbook, and its application to monetary calculations, as his name implies, was a native of Khwarizm. . . .

Ruins, as J. B. Jackson suggests, instruct us not only in the splendid past, but in the ups and downs of history, in cycles that we submit to, but hardly understand.

COMMENTARY

THE QUEST FOR ORDER

IT is easy enough to see why the sophisticated societies of the past were given so much structure. Human capacities are different, motives are not uniform, wisdom is scarce, yet order is necessary. It is obvious to managerial intelligence that the wise ought to be in charge, the capable assigned the work that is demanding, and the energies of the rest engaged in ways appropriate to their abilities. So there were king and class or caste.

But it is equally easy to see why, in the eighteenth century, the lovers of freedom put an end to hereditary succession in positions of political authority and turned the choice of who would do what over to popular vote. Relying on blood lines proved a way of obtaining arrogant rulers who took their privileges for granted and treated the common people like possessions. It required a long period of injustice and abuse of power, with much incisive criticism from the best intelligence of the age, to wean the common people of their feelings of loyalty and duty to the hereditary sovereign, in whose appointment, it was believed, the Deity had had a hand. Among the critics active in the eighteenth century, Tom Paine was one of the most effective. He was able to get through to the self-reliant race of Americans by asking them whether they could go on being tied to the apron strings of a king who "hast little more to do than to make war and give away places." So in America, France, England, and other European countries, by reason of such persuasions, the authority of kings was replaced by legislatures, courts, and elected officials.

But now, after two hundred years of popular government, we have rulers who make war as often as kings, and if the size of governments is an indication, give away places with greater ease. The people have their freedom, but they seem unable to use it to stop the wars and reduce the size of governments. Money rather than ability and integrity wins elections. Office through

purchase instead of by heredity may be an improvement, but today the misuse of power is more far-reaching than it was two hundred years ago. Governments can do more harm. They can easily wreck the planet, we are told, and they seem to have at least the sluggish cooperation of the people in their often destructive projects.

Why can't we have government by the wise? The answer is plain. Wise men have a long-term view, and not enough voters share it.

A practical solution—difficult to obtain without the abolition of war—would be to reduce the power of governments by reducing the size of political units—the reform proposed by Leopold Kohr and implied on almost every page of Schumacher's books. Small countries do less harm. They are less susceptible to delusions of grandeur. The people might be able to choose better rulers and would be less easy to fool. Government would need and have less attention. Communities would develop voluntary structures and social action would be shaped by networks of responsible individuals in relations of mutual trust. What other way is there to order the common life?

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves REPORT FROM INDIA

A LETTER from a reader, a teacher in San Francisco, tells about his six and a half weeks in India, last summer, on a "teacher training project" sponsored by the U.S. Educational Foundation. He says:

Actually, this is the longest standing foreign program for U.S. teachers that I know about which is actually being paid for by a foreign government, in this case India. They are really paying off a grain debt to the U.S. that goes back to the 1960s, as per agreement. I was pleasantly surprised to find more of Mahatma Gandhi's policies actually being adhered to in spirit, if not the letter, than I had expected: particularly self-sufficiency, so far as Indian industry goes (severe limitations on imports) and emphasis on rural help and reconstruction. I had the pleasure twice of having dinner with Gandhi's grandson, Arun Gandhi, who is a journalist with the *Times* of India, in Bombay. He is interested in bona fide rural reconstruction vs. outside sponsored projects. . . .

The program for U.S. teachers is very worthwhile (at least twelve groups participated in it last summer) and to date some 600 teachers from New York state alone (where curriculum of a non-Western nature is required in the secondary schools) have benefited from it in the past.

Arun Gandhi's mother, our correspondent says, now in her eighties, has been maintaining Gandhi's Phoenix Farm settlement in South Africa.

This reader also supplied us with an article by Arun Gandhi which appeared in the *Times* of India last July. The subject is aid to the rural poor. He finds most of the institutions dedicated to rural welfare badly administered and ineffectual. "They have become the preserve of old and tired social workers who successfully resist the injection of fresh blood, new and youthful talent." Since the provision in Indian law of a rule which moderates corporate income tax when help is given to rural areas, new industry-sponsored aid institutions have sprung up. Arun Gandhi says:

These are run on the principles of modern management with a paid staff and the whole gamut of business forms. The wise villager has seen through the industry's game of saving on tax so that instead of working more diligently, he takes life easy and brazenly orders the social worker to indent for all his needs. This the social worker assiduously does and the company quietly pays. Naturally the villager grows accustomed to receiving all aid on a platter. . . . As it happens, not one of the rural schools has a period for gardening. Most of them have ample space all around, which lies barren.

All this, happily, is preface to the account of a glorious exception:

The Matru Mandir at Deorukh in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra has, however, conducted a successful experiment. Among other things, it runs an orphanage for about 50 boys and girls. During one of its periodic rural camps to bring about better understanding between the orphans and the other children, it was learned that many boys in the neighboring villages were keen on further studies but could not afford to pay hostel charges in another town.

Matru Mandir found a way out of this dilemma. It acquired a 20-hectare [close to 50 acres] plot of land, built a modest hostel there and suggested to the boys that instead of paying their board and lodging they may work two hours every day on the farm and produce all the institution needs. To help the 12 young men living in the hostel, the orphans are also sent to work and once or twice a year a camp is held when city boys are requested to spend 15 days and contribute their labour. The city boys have dug four wells, the fourth one has reached forty feet and they hope soon to strike water.

The farm produces a variety of vegetables and fruits, lentils, jowar, rice, and pulses. It is perhaps the only institution of its kind that serves the orphans pure and wholesome food, including several types of seasonal fruit, all of which is produced through their labour. No wonder the children look robust, healthy, and extremely happy, and so are the young men who stay in the hostel and attend the local college. . . .

Indeed, the inmates of the hostel are so conscious of their responsibility that none of them goes home for more than a week during vacations. They are aware that they must tend the fields because the smaller children depend upon the produce for food. This is undoubtedly one of the few institutions run imaginatively. The experiment shows that the

young are eager to work if they are given the opportunity, guidance and encouragement.

The rest of Arun Gandhi's article is devoted to the work of Arun Chavan, a professor of English who decided he could do more good working among the poor farmers in the Sangli area in Maharashtra.

Mr. Chavan found that many small and marginal farmers in the drought-prone villages abandon their land and go to the cities in search of jobs. Such migration creates multiple problems. In the cities it gives rise to slums and at home the families of the breadwinners live an unnatural and unhappy existence, the children seldom seeing their father and the land remaining neglected and fallow.

Most of the villagers from this area had drifted into Bombay's textile industries and had become adept at weaving. Mr. Chavan harnessed this talent and organized the Kranti Industrial Weavers' Cooperative Society with a flourishing factory of its own. Today the cooperative has a hundred members who operate 24 powerlooms and 20 handlooms and produce saris worth lakhs of rupees. They earn more than they ever did. This one simple act of guidance has solved many problems.

Back in the 1950s Vinoba Bhave advised his Gandhian colleagues to avoid connection with government, saying:

I am sure were we to occupy the position and shoulder the responsibility which they do, we would act much in the same manner as they. Whoever occupies office and wields governmental authority must needs think in a narrow, cramped, and set circle. There can be no freedom of thinking for him. He finds himself, as it were, under an obligation to think and act as the world seems to be doing.

The late Jayaprakash Narayan said much the same thing:

Gandhiji did not touch the ruling machinery with a pair of tongs. If law could bring grist to the mill of the people he would certainly have accepted office. Law cannot be instrumental in changing socio-economic values or outlook toward life. That is impossible without a basic change—change at the root.

Change at the root requires what Arun Gandhi spoke of—the sustained use of the

imagination, which is a quality hamstrung by political usage and power.

Two quotations supplied by the San Francisco teacher are worth repeating—both from Erwin Schrödinger's "Sherman Lecture" (in *Nature and the Greeks*):

The scientist subconsciously, almost inadvertently, simplifies his problem of understanding nature by disregarding or cutting out of the picture to be constructed, himself, his own personality, the subject of cognizance.

Inadvertently the thinker steps back into the role of an external observer. . . . [This] facilitates the task very much. But it leaves gaps, enormous lacunae, leads to paradoxes and antinomies whenever, unaware of this initial renunciation, one tries to find oneself in the picture or to put oneself, one's own thinking and sensing mind, back into the picture. It might be called objectivation, looking upon the world as an object. The moment you do that, you have virtually ruled yourself out. . . .

Schrödinger also gives a fragment attributed to Democritus—a dialogue between the intellect and the senses:

Intellect: Sweet is by convention and bitter by convention, hot by convention, cold by convention, colour by convention; in truth there are but atoms and the void.

The Senses: Wretched mind, from us you are taking the evidence by which you would overthrow us? Your victory is your own fall.

FRONTIERS "A Fiction of Science"

ISAAC NEWTON (1649-1727) was mainly interested in the machinery of the universe, and since he was a chief founder of "modern science," this seems appropriate enough. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose life spanned the passage from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century (1772-1834), felt that Newton's achievement was magnificent but its effect a disaster. He blamed the popularity of Newton's discoveries for the decline in the quest for human meaning and strove to renew this search through his poetry and his profound philosophical essays. In short, nearly two hundred years ago the burning issues of the present were already the "frontier" for the poet.

This is sufficient reason for calling attention to the present reviving interest in Coleridge as a philosopher. A book which amply justifies this interest is Owen Barfield's *What Coleridge Thought*, published by Wesleyan University Press in 1971. Here, however, we rely on an article in *Toward* for June, 1979, by Meyer Howard Abrams, who teaches English literature at Cornell University. Among Coleridge's statements on Newton which Mr. Abrams has compiled are the following:

Newton was a mere materialist—*mind*, in his system is always passive,—a lazy Looker-on on an external world. If the mind be not *passive*, if it be indeed made in God's Image, that too in the sublimest sense—the Image of the Creator—there is ground for suspicion, that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system. (Letter to Thomas Poole, 1801.)

Then, from the *Statesman's Manual*:

The commercial spirit, and the ascendancy of the experimental philosophy which took place at the close of the seventeenth century, though both good and beneficial in their own kinds, combined to foster its corruption. Flattered and dazzled by the real or supposed discoveries which it had made, the more the understanding was enriched, the more did it become debased; till science itself put on a selfish and sensual character, and *immediate utility*, in exclusive

reference to the gratification of the wants and appetites of the animal, the vanities and caprices of the social, and the ambition of the political, man was imposed as the test of all intellectual powers and pursuits. *Worth* was degraded into a lazy synonyme of *value*; and the value was exclusively attached to the interest of the senses.

Coleridge regarded a replacement for what we term Newton's World Machine as an essential project to which he devoted his intellectual energies over many years. His comments along the way anticipate many present-day criticisms. Meyer Abrams provides this summary:

Coleridge's aim was not to replace experimental science by speculative science, but instead to develop a counter-metaphysic to the metaphysical foundations of modern science; his philosophy of nature, in short, was not science, nor anti-science, but metascience. By the reference, in his letter to Tieck, to Newton's "monstrous fictions" in the *Opticks*, he did not mean to oppugn Newton as an experimental physicist, to whose procedures and discoveries he paid spacious tribute. His objection was to Newton as a man whose prestige as a physicist has given impetus to a metaphysics that, in Coleridge's view, permeated and vitiated all areas of thought and culture in the eighteenth century, "the Epoch of the Understanding and the Senses" in philosophy, psychology, politics, religion and the arts. For despite his reluctance to feign hypotheses, Newton had proposed, in the "Queries" he added to his *Opticks*, that rays of light are "corpuscular," that is, "very small Bodies emitted from shining Substances," and that these bodies in motion excite "Waves of Vibrations, or Tremors" in a hypothetical "aether." This aether, although very "rare and subtle," is nonetheless a material medium that pervades, in varying densities, both space and bodies and serves to explain not only the action at a distance both of light and gravity, but also the refraction and reflection of light, as well as the propagation of light and sound from the eye and ear through the nerves "into the place of Sensation" where they are converted into sight and hearing. . . . And as ultimate reality is thus reduced to masses and motion—for the simple reason that these are the only things that the highly specialized techniques of physical science are capable of managing mathematically—so the Creator of this reality is reconstrued to accord with such a postulated creation. That is, Newton's God is represented as the omnipresent mover of particles. . . .

Newton's move, as Coleridge saw it, was an immense extrapolation of a working fiction of physical science—what we now call a "conceptual model"—into a picture of the actual constitution of the universe. The "Mechanic or Corpuscular Scheme," Coleridge said, "in order to submit the various phenomena of moving bodies to geometrical construction," had to abstract "from corporeal substance all its *positive* properties," leaving it only "figure and mobility. And as a fiction *of science*, it would be difficult to overvalue this invention." But Descartes and later thinkers "propounded it as *truth of fact*; and instead of a World created and filled with productive forces by the Almighty *Fiat*, left a lifeless Machine whirled about by the dust of its own Grinding. . . ."

How could Coleridge see all this a hundred and fifty years before the rest of us? His mind was not *passive*; he understood something of the power of the imagination, using it deliberately with high intentions. As Mr. Abrams goes on to say:

Against this world-picture, in the literal sense of "picture" as something that can be visualized, Coleridge again and again brings the charge that it is, precisely speaking, lethal. It has killed the living and habitable world of ordinary experience, as well as the metaphysical world of the pre-Cartesian and pre-Newtonian past, in which the mind of man had recognized an analogon to itself and to its life, purposes, sentiments, values and needs, a world, therefore in which man was a participant and could feel thoroughly at home. By the translation of the "scientific calculus" from a profitable fiction into ontology, Coleridge claimed in 1817 "a few brilliant discoveries have been dearly purchased at the loss of all communion with life and the spirit of Nature." And against this "philosophy of death," which leaves only the "relations of unproductive particles to each other," he posed his own philosophy of life, in which "the two component counter-powers actually interpenetrate each other and generate a higher third, including both the former. . . ."

Mr. Abrams finds all this through the provocation of a single poem by Coleridge—"The Eolian Harp," in which the poet asks—

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps

Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?