

## A DIFFICULT INQUIRY

IN his editorial in the January issue of the *Saturday Review*, Norman Cousins draws attention to the role of "religious forces" known collectively as the Moral Majority in the 1980 presidential election. It is, he says, by no means undesirable for religious conviction to play a part in political decision or to seek to influence political action. Religious feeling, he suggests, served well in the 1960s—contributing substantially to the ultimate withdrawal of troops from Vietnam. But another intention became manifest in the recent election campaign. "The difference between what happened in the 1960s and what happened in 1980 is that the Moral Majority movement in the recent election did not merely encourage people to become active in behalf of their religious convictions. It sought to establish itself as a power over government." Mr. Cousins finds this attempt moving "on a collision course with the American tradition that draws a line between religious influence and religious control."

He continues with a brief account of the genesis of that tradition in the work of the Founding Fathers of the nation:

Many of them or their ancestors came to America to free themselves of political rule by religious forces. They could bear personal witness to the way religion becomes inimical to itself and to a nation when it occupies a position of political power. In separating religion from politics they did not intend that it would not be concerned with political issues. What they sought to do was to keep it from being a prime authority in the affairs of government or a center for dictating an individual's vote.

Freedom of religion, as the Founding Fathers saw it, was not just the right to associate oneself with a certain denomination but the right to dissociate without penalty. Belief or nonbelief was a matter of individual choice—a right underwritten in the basic charter of the nation's liberties. Religion should be barred from any official political status.

The makers of the Constitution, Mr. Cousins points out, were clear in their realization that matters which lie beyond ordinary comprehension, and therefore beyond definition, must remain outside the authority of legislators.

It was only when this transcendent reality sought to be institutionalized that they became concerned—concerned in the sense that they knew that religions sought to speak in the name of truth but that, since there were different religions, truth could become competitive and even combustible. Therefore, the duty of government was to make truth a private rather than an official matter. People could select their truths as they could select anything else in a society that knew it had to be protected against autocracy in any form—political, social, ecclesiastical. . . .

One can recognize the right and indeed the duty of any individual or group in the society to act in behalf of its moral convictions. But such actions have to stay within clearly defined limits. The moment religious forces seek to control government rather than to influence it they threaten the very society they seek to protect.

What are those "clearly defined limits"? It is not difficult to determine what they are. There shall be no law respecting the establishment of religion, and no prohibition of the free exercise thereof. The public schools, as agencies of government, are not to teach religion, since this would inevitably add the authority of government to preference for one religion over another. And there shall be no religious test as requirement or qualification for holding any office or public trust in the United States. The Government, in short, when it comes to matters relating to ultimate truth, is to remain silent and deliberately impotent—positive, that is, in its hands-off policy. The Government does not know, indeed *cannot* know religious truth, for the reason that the principal function of government is to exercise coercive power—that is, to make laws and

enforce them—and in the area of religion coercion is not only self-defeating but an intrinsic evil.

This is the American tradition Norman Cousins referred to, yet it is a tradition in constant danger of being neglected and abandoned as a result of ignorance of its value and indifference to the principle which it represents. Again and again people are heard to declare that our laws are turning out godless atheists, since religion may not be taught in the schools. Being persuaded that there is but one true religion—their own—these advocates of an officially supported faith seem to relish the prospect of commanding the rest of the population to believe as they do. They are, one must say, rather bad Americans, if the founders of this country and the designers of its original laws are held to be examples of good ones.

How is this decline over a period of some two hundred years to be understood? Assigning causes is a difficult procedure when it comes to such questions. It seems wholly unlikely that we shall be able to discern which cause has been the most decisive, and quite likely that there are factors in play of which we know nothing. Yet it is nonetheless important to do what we can in the way of devising remedies. For thinking about this the work of Alexis de Tocqueville, who pursued an intensive study of American society a hundred and fifty years ago, may be of value. While the America of 1831-35, when he came here from France, may seem very different from the United States of today, thoughtful scholars have declared that what he says is often as pertinent now as it was then, since Tocqueville *foresaw* as well as saw both the values and the hazards of the democratic way of life. His two-volume report, *Democracy in America*, was first published in France between 1835 and 1840, and issued in English in 1862 (we are using the Vintage paperback edition of 1954, edited by Phillips Bradley). While Tocqueville reached a favorable conclusion about democracy, urging it on his own countrymen, no critic has been more searching in

the elaboration of its flaws. Only fifty years after the American Revolution he wrote:

I attribute the small number of distinguished men in political life to the ever increasing despotism of the majority in the United States.

When the American Revolution broke out, they arose in great numbers; for public opinion then served, not to tyrannize over, but to direct the exertions of individuals. Those celebrated men, sharing the agitation of mind common at that period, had a grandeur peculiar to themselves, which was reflected back upon the nation, but was by no means borrowed from it.

This Gallic candor seems of great importance. We simply do not know what produced the "peculiar grandeur" of the Founding Fathers, but only that it was real, and has been an object lesson to Americans ever since. (A study of the *Federalist Papers* and de Tocqueville's book in every high school in the country—for a time to the exclusion of everything else in the name of "Social Studies"—might do more for American democracy than any other single influence.) Tocqueville continues:

In free countries, where everyone is more or less called upon to give his opinion on affairs of state, in democratic republics, where public life is incessantly mingled with domestic affairs, where the sovereign authority is accessible on every side, and where its attention can always be attracted by vociferation, more persons are apt to be met with who speculate upon its weaknesses and live upon ministering to its passions than in absolute monarchies. Not because men are naturally worse in these states than elsewhere, but the temptation is stronger and at the same time of easier access.

Democratic republics extend the practice of currying favor with the many and introduce it into all classes at once, this is the most serious reproach that can be addressed to them. This is especially true in democratic states organized like the American republics, where the power of the majority is so absolute and irresistible that one must give up one's rights as a citizen and almost abjure one's qualities as a man if one intends to stray from the track which it prescribes.

In that immense crowd which throngs the avenues to power in the United States, I found very

few men who displayed that manly candor and masculine independence of opinion which frequently distinguished the Americans in former times, and which constitutes the leading feature in distinguished characters wherever they may be found. It seems at first sight as if all the minds of Americans were formed on one model, so accurately do they follow the same route. A stranger does, indeed, sometimes meet with Americans who dissent from the rigor of these formulas, with men who deplore the defects of the laws, the mutability and the ignorance of democracy, who even go so far as to observe the evil tendencies that impair the national character, and to point out such remedies as might be possible to apply; but no one is there to hear them except yourself, and you, to whom these secret reflections are confided, are a stranger and a bird of passage. They are very ready to communicate truths which are useless to you, but they hold a different language in public.

When Tocqueville was writing this, the population of the United States was about fifteen million—between seven and eight per cent of our present number—yet it is easy enough to see today the traits he describes. The individuals who are ready and able to consider the practical limitations of democratic government are so few that their thinking seems almost entirely without effect. They, like their ancestors, are quite willing "to communicate truths" and do so in occasional books and small-circulation journals, but as for affecting public opinion in general, the prospects remain depressingly dim.

Here, too, Tocqueville's observations are both valuable and up-to-date. He concludes his discussion of the free press in the United States:

It was remarked by a man of genius that "ignorance lies at the two ends of knowledge." Perhaps it would have been more correct to say that strong convictions are found only at the two ends, and that doubt lies in the middle. The human intellect, in truth, may be considered in three distinct states, which frequently succeed one another.

A man believes firmly because he adopts a proposition without inquiry. He doubts as soon as objections present themselves. But he frequently succeeds in satisfying these doubts, and then he begins again to believe. This time he has not a dim and casual glimpse of the truth, but sees it clearly before him and advances by the light it gives.

When the liberty of the press acts upon men who are in the first of these three states, it does not immediately disturb their habit of believing implicitly without investigation, but it changes every day the objects of their unreflecting convictions. The human mind continues to discern but one point at a time upon the whole intellectual horizon, and that point is constantly changing. . . . The circle of novel ideas, however, is soon traveled over. Experience comes to undeceive men and plunges them into doubt and general mistrust. We may rest assured that the majority of mankind will always remain in one of these two states, will either believe they know not wherefore, or will not know what to believe. Few are those who can ever attain to that other state of rational and independent conviction which true knowledge can produce out of the midst of doubt.

It has been remarked that in times of great religious fervor men sometimes change their religious opinions; whereas in times of general skepticism everyone clings to his old persuasion. The same thing takes place in politics under the liberty of the press. In countries where all the theories of social science have been contested in their turn, men who have adopted one of them stick to it, not so much because they are sure of its truth as because they are not sure that there is any better to be had. In the present age men are not very ready to die for their opinions; there are few martyrs as well as few apostates.

Another still more valid reason may be adduced: when no opinions are looked upon as certain, men cling to the mere instincts and material interests of their position, which are naturally more tangible, definite, and permanent than any opinions in the world.

What is the value of recalling these sagacious observations? The main thing to be gained from them is almost certainly a realistic appreciation of what can actually be done by attempts to marshal public opinion in behalf of political action. Even assuming that we know what to do—which is questionable—there remain the practical conditions Tocqueville describes. It seems quite evident that anyone who seriously attempts to improve the human condition by means of political action is actually undertaking a much larger project—one which neither he nor anyone else is

able to define—the mass re-education of the human race.

A distillation of the problem was given by Daniel Ellsberg (in *Papers on the War*) in his description of what he encountered when he tried to clarify the issues and correct the blunders and self-deceptions which led the United States into the Vietnam War. As he put it—

. . . the U.S. Government, starting ignorant, did not, would not, *learn*. There was a whole set of what amounted to institutional "anti-learning" mechanisms working to preserve and guarantee unadaptive and unsuccessful behavior: the fast turnover in personnel; the lack of institutional memory at any level; the failure to study history, to analyze or even record operational experience or mistakes; the effective pressures for optimistically false reporting at every level, for describing "progress" rather than problems or failure, thus concealing the very need for change in approach or for learning.

Ellsberg wrote this to explain the frustration he experienced from not being able to affect the willful blindness and immorality of the war in Vietnam, a feeling which finally drove him to release the Pentagon Papers to the *New York Times*. But we might ask: Is there any reason to think that the same obstacles to "learning" by government are absent in other political decisions and affairs? Why should they be? The same structures of authority and bureaucracy are involved, although perhaps less urgently.

It is of interest to go from this suggestive but sketchy analysis to a book which came out in 1978—*New Age Politics* (Delta paperback, \$4.95) by Mark Satin. The wealth of the material on the changes of thinking in recent years is likely to make the reader dizzy with its masses of quotation and detail. One can assume from this work that the "Americans who dissent," to whom Tocqueville refers, have become somewhat more numerous and articulate, and are gaining followers throughout the country. The critical and affirmative themes they are developing are described by Satin in 350 pages. He begins by declaring that the oppressive social problems of

the present—war, exploitation, racism, environmental degradation—"have their roots not so much in our institutions as in our mentality or consciousness." Dozens of writers, he says, have been attempting to define our most basic beliefs, and he summarizes their findings as made up of a cultural complex whose six main elements are: "patriarchal attitudes, egocentricity, scientific single vision, the bureaucratic mentality, nationalism, and the big city outlook." He identifies this complex as the "six-sided prison."

He calls his book "*New Age Politics*," but the title seems misleading in the sense that the problems he has subjected to analysis are all *pre-political*, hardly to be got at by what we regard as political means. As he says himself in a late chapter:

Laws cannot substitute for the transformation of the minds, hearts, and self-perceptions of the American people. In fact, as we have seen, "good" laws might have the effect of reinforcing our old attitudes and patterns of behavior by filling us with resentment and causing us to feel alienated from our society. . . .

I want to emphasize that this is not a political platform, except maybe in name.

In short, he means that the constructive attitudes he would like to see become widely current are proposed as the basis for the politics of a changed future for America. But what might result from the general adoption of these attitudes—a consummation for which no one has the formula—is a vast *reduction* in "political" activity, since common sense would prevail in indicating that very little of importance can be accomplished in human affairs by strictly or familiar political means. The politics of a good society, in these terms, would be little more than legislative sanction and approval of ways of life brought into being by developments far more intimate and far-reaching than anything the coarse methods of political action could accomplish. Satin's book is really a kind of survey of the state of mind of the people of the United States, and a sequel to de Tocqueville's study in this sense. He

is setting the problem in contemporary terms. He offers what he calls "Six New Age Political Values" to take the place of the "six-sided prison." They are social and economic well-being, social and political justice, cultural, intellectual and spiritual freedom, environmental quality, community and regional self-reliance, and nonviolence.

Instead of calling these goals a new kind of "politics," Mark Satin might better have borrowed from Gotthold Lessing the title of his most impressive work. *The Education of the Human Race* (1777), consisting of a hundred brief paragraphs maintaining that "no dogmatic creed can be regarded as final, but that every historical religion had its share in the development of the spiritual life of mankind." Lessing also believed that "history reveals a definite law of progress, and that occasional retrogression may be necessary for the advance of the world towards its ultimate goal." Lessing's most often quoted lines are these:

It is not the truth that a man possesses, or believes that he possesses, but the earnest effort which he puts forth to reach the truth, which constitutes the worth of a man. For it is not by the possession, but the search after truth that he enlarges his power, wherein alone consists his ever-increasing perfection. Possession makes one content, indolent, proud. . . .

The point is that it will take lots of humans who have adopted something of Lessing's stance—formulated in the same age as that of the Founding Fathers in America—to embrace the practical means described in Mark Satin's *New Age Politics*. Stripped of its contemporary language and labels, he writes in terms of a philosophical or religious attitude of which Lessing was a pioneer—even to the "new age" emphasis on metempsychosis and spiritual evolution. All that we can have, in Lessing's view, "are only inadequate, historically conditioned expressions of (ultimate) truth and not the truth itself" (Allison, *Lessing and the Enlightenment*), and these expressions "inevitably contain elements of obscurity and incomprehensibility, which are

merely the necessary concomitants of all finite and limited knowledge."

Politics is always an empirical undertaking. It can have little to do with ideas which are by nature ambiguous, obscure, and transcendent, yet which, despite this mystery, are the inspiration and guide in the formation of human character. Politics is concerned with the mundane affairs of generations of men, while Lessing and those who think as he did about human development write of the generations of souls, whose destiny has its own rhythm, different indeed from the flow of events in the finite regions of political action. Once in a while—once in a century, perhaps—the two paths may be united for a brief interlude. This happened, one could say, in America in the nineteenth century, during the chaotic interval of Lincoln's presidency, and again in the twentieth century in India through the genius of Mohandas Gandhi. On these occasions the rhythms of soul-striving seemed conjoined with political struggles, but they soon separated after a climax had been reached. Some unknown principle of balance may bring the two fields together in the lives of great men, briefly obliterating the distinction between politics and religion. For all others, except on rare occasions, the union is dangerous if not impossible. And we might remember the angry political passions which brought the lives of both Lincoln and Gandhi to an end, and recall, also, the fate of Socrates, who dared to call Athens to the moral standards by which he was able to live.

## REVIEW

### BOUTIMAR, THE DOVE

[Leafing through a book by Lafcadio Hearn—*Stray Leaves from Strange Literature*—we came across this translation of a Persian tale, and it seemed very much worth reprinting, by reason of its beauty, its moral splendor, and because it reveals something of the high cultural background of the people whom we now call Iranians, usually with irritation and distaste. Their civilization, like ours, may have fallen among thieves, and the recovery of its primitive excellence, again like ours, may seem remote, but who could fail to long for fellowship with the people who, in the distant past, were capable of producing such literature?]

. . . *Beyond the seas which are known roar the waters of that Tenebrous Ocean that is unknown to mortals. There the long breakers chant an eternal hymn, in tones unlike to the voices of other seas. And in that ocean there is an island, and in that island the Fountain of Youth unceasingly bubbles up from the mystic caverns; and it was that fountain which King Alexander the Two-Horned, vainly sought. Only his general, the Prophet Khader, found it, whereby he became immortal. And of other mortals Solomon only beheld the waters of that fountain, according to the Persian legend written in the nine hundredth year of the Hejira, by the goldsmith of language, Hossein ben Ali, also called El Vaëz u'l Kashfi. And it may be found in the ANVARI SOHEILI, which are "The Lights of Canopus." . . .*

IN the Name of the Most Merciful God! . . . I have heard this tradition of Solomon, the unparalleled among kings, for whom all Genii, and Peris, and men, and beasts of earth, and birds of air, and creatures of the deep begirt the loins of their souls with the girdle of obedience, and whose power was measurable only by the hoofs of the horse of the Zephyr, "whose morning course is a month's journey, and whose evening course is also equal to a month's journey, upon the swiftest of earthly steeds."

. . . Now, Solomon being once enthroned upon the summit of the mightiest of mountains, which yet bears his name, the mountain at once overlooking the plains of Iran and the kingdoms of India,—all the creatures of the universe gathered to do him honor. The birds of heaven formed a living canopy above him, and the spirits of air ministered unto him. And, as a mist rising from the earth, a perfumed cloud shaped itself before him; and from out the cloud reached a hand, fairer than moonlight, holding a diamond cup in which a strange water made jewel-glimmerings, while a voice sweeter than music spake to him from out the cloud, saying: "The Creator of all—be His nature forever glorified and His power forever honored!—hath sent me to thee, O Solomon, with this cup containing the waters of youth and of life without end. And He hath desired thee to choose freely whether thou wilt or wilt not drink of this draught from the Fountain of Youth. Therefore consider well, O Solomon! Wilt thou drink hereof, and live divinely immortal through ages everlasting, or wilt thou rather remain within the prison of humanity? . . . I wait."

Then a deep silence brooded above the place; for Solomon dreamed upon these words, while the perfumed cloud stirred not, and the white hand motionlessly offered the jewel-cup. And so dreaming, he said unto his own heart: "Surely the gold of life is good wherewith to purchase many things at the great market of the Resurrection; the plain of life is a rich soil wherein to plant the spice-trees of eternal felicity; and joyless is the black repose of death. . . . Yet must I ask counsel of the Genii, and the Peris, and the wisest of men, and the beasts of earth, and the birds of air, before I may resolve to drink."

Still the moon-white hand offered the scintillating cup, and the perfumed cloud changed not. Then the Genii, and the Peris, and the wisest of men, and the beasts of earth, and the birds of heaven, all speaking with one voice of agreement, prayed him that he should drink, inasmuch as the well-being of the world reposed upon his living

wisdom, and the happiness of all creatures was sustained by the circle of his life as a jewel held within the setting of a ring of gold.

So that Solomon indeed put out his hand, and took the cup from the luminous fingers; and the fingers withdrew again into the odorous cloud. Wondrous were the lights within the water; and there was a glow of rosiness unbroken all about the cup, as of the sempiternal dawn in those islands beyond the Ocean of Shadows, where the sun rises never above the east and there is neither night nor day. But hesitating yet once more before he drank, he questioned again the creatures of the universe, asking: "O ye administering Genii and Peri beings, ye wisest among wise men, ye creatures also of air and of earth, say if there be absent from this assembly even one representative of all over whom I hold dominion!"

And they replied: "Master, only Boutimar is not here,—Boutimar the wild dove, most loving of all living creatures."

Then Solomon sent Hudh-hudh to seek the wild dove,—Hudh-hudh, the bird of gold, created by the witchcraft of Balkis, Queen of Sheba, the sorceress of sorceresses; and the golden bird brought back with him Boutimar, the wild dove, most loving of all living creatures. Then it was that Solomon repeated the words of the song which he had written: "O my dove that dwellest in the cliffs of the rock, in the secret hiding-places of the stairs, let me see thy face, let me hear thy voice! . . . Is it meet that thy lord, Solomon, shall drink of the waters of youth and know the bliss of earthly immortality?"

Then the wild dove, speaking in the tongue of birds known to Solomon only among mortals, asked the prophet-king, saying: "How shall a creature of air answer the source of wisdom? how may so feeble a mind advise thy supernal intelligence? Yet, if I must counsel, let me ask thee, O Solomon, whether the Water of Life brought hither by this perfumed spirit be for thee alone, or for all with whom thy heart might incline thee to share it?"

But Solomon answered: "It hath been sent to only me, nor is there enough within the cup for any other."

"O prophet of God!" answered Boutimar, in the tongue of birds, "how couldst thou desire to be living alone, when each of thy friends and of thy counsellors and of thy children and of thy servants and of all who loved thee were counted with the dead? For all of these must surely drink the bitter waters of death, though thou shouldst drink the Water of Life. Wherefore desire everlasting youth, when the face of the world itself shall be wrinkled with age, and the eyes of the stars shall be closed by the black fingers of Azrael? When the love thou hast sung of shall have passed away like a smoke of frankincense, when the dust of the heart that beat against shine own shall have long been scattered by the four winds of heaven, when the eyes that looked for thy coming shall have become a memory, when the voices grateful to shine ear shall have been eternally stilled, when thy life shall be one oasis in a universal waste of death, and shine eternal existence but a recognition of eternal absence,—wilt thou indeed care to live, though the wild dove perish when its mate cometh not?"

And Solomon, without reply, silently put out his arm and gave back the cup, so that the white hand came forth and took it, and withdrew into the odorous cloud, and the cloud dissolved and passed away forever. But upon the prophet-king's rich beard, besprinkled with powder of gold, there appeared another glitter as of clear dew,—the diamond dew of the heart, which is tears.

## COMMENTARY NOW, IN BRAZIL

IN *Not Man Apart* for March, Herman Daly, author of *Steady State Economics*, tells the story of Jose A. Lutzenberger, a Brazilian agricultural engineer of German descent, now in his fifties, who ten years ago quit a well-paying job with a multinational firm, as technical adviser on chemical fertilizers and biocides, to become the wellinformed champion of organic and ecological reforms. He lives in the southern coastal city of Porto Alegre, working as a landscape architect, and has a consulting firm called "Convivial Technology." Daly says: "His inside knowledge of the pesticide industry and his personal experience with organic agriculture have made him the nemesis of the agri-business-chemical complex in Brazil, which is the world's third largest user of biocides." He has a wide following among students and professional agronomists, but feels that nothing has changed in Brazil "regarding the wholesale destruction of nature." Yet he never stops campaigning. According to Daly:

"Lutz," as he is called by his many friends, is playing the same role in Brazil today as Rachel Carson played in the U.S. in the early 1960s. It might be more accurate to say that he is the combined Rachel Carson, Paul Erlich, Amory Lovins, and David Brower of Brazil because he fights pesticides, overpopulation, energy waste, nuclear power, and in addition founded Brazil's strongest association for protection of the environment, AGAPAN.

Brazil, with a population of 119,175,000 (seventy-one million ten years ago), occupies half the continent of South America. The country's present policy of dealing with the environment, Daly says, has seven modes: "(1) dig it up (2) cut it down (3) fill it in (4) dam it (5) burn it (6) plant it with monocultures and spray it with chemical biocides (7) overwhelm it with massive concentrations of people."

He asked Lutzenberger what is going on in the Amazon basin, obtaining this reply:

The most complex and wonderful of biomes is being burned, knocked down by dragging great chains between huge tractors, defoliated with Agent Orange, et cetera. Entire communities of plants and animals are being irrevocably lost, some before we have even catalogued them. In their place are being planted vast monocultures, which are inherently unstable. Most don't last five years, and require massive doses of biocides and fertilizers that pollute rivers and lakes and kill wildlife.

Indian cultures are being wiped out. We think that "the Indians have no right to hold back progress." But what right, other than that of brute force, allows us to invade the Indian's world with heavy machinery, chain saws, and chemical defoliants sprayed by airplanes? Who is the real barbarian? . . .

We have enough land in Brazil that we could postpone exploiting the Amazon until we learn enough about the marvellous patterns of life to do so intelligently and sustainably. We must restrain both our own greed and that of foreign companies. We have much to learn from the remaining Indian tribes.

Decentralization of power, dependence on local resources, and soft technology are the only answer for Brazil, according to Jose Lutzenberger.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### WHEN EVERYONE IS RESPONSIBLE

JOHN BARELL, a teacher in Montclair (N.J.) State College, reported in the *New York Times* for last Dec. 14 on what seems to him the devastating success of our educational system in keeping the young from thinking for themselves. He began:

A colleague of mine recently asked his sophomore philosophy class to define civilization. The students' definitions focused mainly upon statements such as "following the rules" and "doing what you are told."

The quality of thought revealed by those potential leaders of United States suggested a concreteness and conformity that was disturbing. It reflected a possible inability to transcend one's immediate authority figures in order to analyze very complex situations and envision alternatives to the status quo—an act of the imagination.

To conceive civilization as a process of interaction between persons and their environment that results in the improvement of our living in the world and exemplifies the best in human feelings, thought, and aspiration requires the ability to think abstractly. Perhaps these young philosophy students had not developed to that mental stage where individuals think independently and question authority, a stage first evident during adolescence.

We started out by saying that the schools are successful in preventing independent thinking by students, but that may be quite unfair. It ignores the fact that even in good schools, with very good teachers, some students, perhaps most, don't learn how to think. The young are formed (1) by heredity, (2) environment, and (3) by a mysterious *tertium quid* which is often decisive but not understood—call it the X-factor. Plato would have named it the incarnating *nous*, the soul which, as Wordsworth put it, "cometh from afar."

To "think independently and question authority" is an endowment that can be fostered and encouraged but it can't be handed by one person to another. In any given population, the proportion of people who exercise it is likely to be

fractional. In the best short essay on education we know of—the first chapter of Ortega's *Some Lessons in Metaphysics* (Norton, 1969)—the Spanish philosopher makes a lucid comparison between ordinary students and the handful who insist upon doubting what they are taught:

It is enough to compare the approach of a man who is going to study an already-existing science with the approach of a man who feels a real, sincere, and genuine need for it. The former will tend not to question the content of a science, not to criticize it; on the contrary, he will tend to comfort himself by thinking that the content of the science which already exists has a defined value, is pure truth. What he seeks is simply to assimilate it as it already is. On the other hand, the man who is needful of a science, he who feels the profound necessity of truth, will approach this ready-made knowledge with caution, full of suspicion and prejudice, submitting it to criticism, even assuming in advance that what the book says is not true. In short, for the very reason that he needs, with such deep anguish, to know, he will think that this knowledge does not exist, and he will manage to unmake what is presented as already made. It is men like this who are constantly correcting, renewing, recreating science.

This being the reality behind "education," Ortega declared that the task of the teacher is not simply to transmit the "cultural tradition." Doing this is not education and may be its opposite. The only important business of the teacher is to try to do what is almost impossible—to inspire in others the *hunger to know*. He can do this best by revealing his own hunger, and his determination to move heaven and earth in order to satisfy it. In the presence of such teachers, a few more students than usual will begin to ask questions on their own.

But even the finest of teachers, to say nothing of "schools," can do only so much. The grain of the times is against serious questioning and thinking. John Barell says:

There are many possible causes for the lack of abstract and imaginative thinking by the young. For example, we are constantly bombarded with appeals to purchase commodities and to vote for personalities through emotional identification rather than logic.

Another reason may be that our society places such a premium upon the ability to measure and quantify results that teaching and learning keep on emphasizing the recollection of facts rather than real thinking about complex problems that may yield idiosyncratic solutions. The "back to basics" trend and the rigidities of school bureaucracies have only aggravated this situation.

Colleges of education have not been leaders in preparing teachers who stimulate the inventive, imaginative minds of all students. One difficulty is that too often adults do not know how to challenge a young, inquisitive mind, and, when we are questioned, we are ill-prepared to respond with empathy.

Well, this is a teacher calling teachers to account. But one must ask, to whom is he speaking? Whom does he expect to be changed by what he says? It is easier to write to the *New York Times* than to reconstruct a present-day institution of learning.

The people who accomplish actual changes are those who no longer bother with institutions and occupy themselves with more feasible undertakings. An example—one of the best—is the career of John Holt, who is convinced that the time has come to "deschool" society, or that portion of it now looking for something better for their children than the existing schools. (See *Learning without Schooling*, John Holt's paper, \$15 for six issues, 308 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116.) A really good school is such a rare thing that really responsible parents may decide to do without them. Holt wants to help such parents.

Material from other sources makes plain the hopelessness of starting at the other end—by tinkering with institutions. For example, we found in the Winter 1980 *CoEvolution Quarterly* this quotation from Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*, garnishing an article on Edward F. Ricketts, the real biologist behind the character "Doc":

"It has always seemed strange to me," said Doc. "The things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our system.

And those traits we detest, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self interest are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second."

In the same key is the report of an animated cartoon called "Every Child," produced in Canada by Gaston Gauthier, which won an Oscar in 1979. The report appears in the Summer 1980 *Transition*, publication of the Vanier Institute of the Family in Ottawa:

The cartoon starts with the child on the laps of two radio or television announcers. These two entertainers are amusing the child with funny noises and "kitchy-coos." Then one sees the child with a very preoccupied businessman; as he has the misfortune of disturbing this gentleman's papers, he is quickly turned out as an intolerable nuisance, a threat to the man's business and work. Another door must be tried and the child now finds himself with a couple who are deliriously in love and wholly occupied with their sentimental outpourings. Naturally, the child's presence is soon seen as an incompatible hindrance to this idyllic situation, to remove the disturbance to the loving couple's intimacy, the child is once more expelled. Then he finds himself with people who have a dog. But not for long, as the dog reacts rather negatively to the child's presence and the child once more finds himself in the street.

Then we see the child bounced about and put out of one house after another until his small pram rolls toward a rather repulsive dump. In this dirty and sordid place, he gets a warm and loving, sincere and delighted welcome from two vagrants, two poor shaggy tramps in rags. The film ends with the child once again in the company of the two announcers who, unlike the other characters in the film, are played by actors.

It is not quite a mystery why such a film won an award.

## *FRONTIERS*

### The Long Road

PUBLICATIONS of the peace movement—the War Resisters International monthly *Newsletter* and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation *Report*—are filled with news of ferment and struggle around the world. From the *IFOR Report* for last December we take the following:

Gadi Elganzi, an 18-year-old Israeli soldier, faces a possible prison term for refusing to serve in the occupied territories. He is part of a small movement of soldiers, known as the Group of 27, who last year declared in a letter to then Minister of Defense Weizman: "We oppose the occupation and the resulting oppression of the Palestinian people, therefore the undersigned, who are called up for military service, refuse to fulfill that obligation in the occupied territories. We hope that this refusal will contribute to bringing about peace between the Jewish people in Israel and the Palestinian Arab people.

Four of the Group of 27 have served or are presently serving prison terms for their refusal, which they see as a political statement. "By doing military service in the occupied territories, we would be supporting the expansionist policy of Israel and helping in the oppression of the Palestinian people," they state. "We are against the killing of civilians, against the destruction of houses, and against the prohibition of political activities. We believe that Israel must withdraw from the occupied territories and recognize the right of the Palestinians to their own state."

Elsewhere in the *IFOR Report*, Jim Forest interviews Joseph Abileah, a violinist who was founder of the Haifa Symphony Orchestra. Forest asked this Israeli pacifist how he came to be a believer in nonviolence. Abileah described an experience in 1936 when everyone in that region was in danger. One day, on an excursion in an Arab area, he encountered a group of Moslems.

We had a short conversation. When they found out that I was of Jewish origin, they threatened to kill me, saying they had to because they had received an order to kill every Jewish person they met. So I said, "If it is your duty, go ahead. I am in your hands." I understood Arabic quite well, so I understood when they talked among themselves, and one proposed that

they throw me in a well. When I heard this I quietly asked where this well was situated and went in that direction. When I reached the place and the people surrounded me, I stood on the opening of the well. And there was not a single one who had the heart to push me in. It was a difficult situation. They didn't want to set me free since they would be convicted of not having fulfilled their duty. But no one wanted to be first to do something which they felt in their hearts was wrong. Finally they thought of a way, a formal way, to make me a Moslem and then set me free. . . . I realized when I was saved in this way the uselessness and senselessness of arms for defense.

This remained his position. Later, after 1947, the nation of Israel ordered him to court because he would not serve in the army. "I was," he said, "32 and liable for full service."

I said to my judges: Do you expect me to kill my schoolmates whom I sat with on one school bench? I will not do it, I will go to prison.

The judges said: You remain at home, but other people go and defend you and your family. I said: No, these people don't defend me and my family. They cannot, because they defend only an institution which is called the state. The state was founded to give me security and has failed. It cannot give me security. Not only Israel cannot do it, no other state in the world today can assure the lives of its citizens.

I said this 30 years ago to my judges. If they called me today, I would give them statistics to prove it. Of all those killed in the Second World War, 47 per cent were civilians. In Korea it was 84 per cent, and in Vietnam 90 per cent. Statistics from recent larger confrontations—there are many wars now going on—show that only one out of ten persons killed is a soldier. How can we speak of soldiers defending the population?

The Award of the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize to Adolpho Perez Esquivel, coordinator of Servicio Paz y Justicia (Service for Peace and Justice, founded in 1971 in Costa Rica), has led to increased interest in the spread of the spirit of nonviolence in South America. A sculptor living in Buenos Aires, Devi Prasad relates in the November *WRI Newsletter*, Esquivel determined to take personal action in behalf of peace and justice, which had been themes in his art. With others he started a community center modeled on

the Ark of Lanza del Vasto in France and began publishing a paper, *Paz y Justicia* campaigning for human rights. When the military took over the Argentine government in 1976, Esquivel was arrested and imprisoned for more than a year, and subjected to beatings and torture. His release resulted from the efforts of Amnesty International, WRI, IFOR, and others.

Esquivel now continues his struggle for peace and justice, using the lever of the Nobel Prize to obtain information about the 10,000 to 20,000 kidnapped persons in Argentina, in response to the anguished pleas of their families. He is intent on showing what can be accomplished through nonviolence. "If," he says, "we analyze the case of Argentina, which is my country—the land of the disappeared—there are . . . many examples. What the guerrillas were not able to do in Argentina, a popular mobilization is doing today in the face of perhaps the bloodiest dictatorship in all of Latin America."

Pat Rice, born in Ireland and now working in behalf of political exiles in Venezuela, told a representative of *Dawn*, an Irish journal devoted to nonviolence, that there are changes in attitude in Latin America.

. . . at the beginning of the 'seventies there was a real dilemma there. If you said you were nonviolent they said you were petit bourgeois, you're not really ready for revolution, you're not really for change in society, you're with the status quo. Since that time there has been a change and I think thanks to a lot of people who have said—Look, my option is this one, to work in a nonviolent way for change, totally identified with the process of liberation, the struggle for a new society, and I will work in my own capacity. A lot of people have done that through the press through journalism, lawyers have done it defending prisoners, by being prepared to work side by side with people who didn't see things the same way. . . . It's almost suicidal for a lot of people to think of a violent option in the southern cone countries. In Chile, Argentina and other countries, a violent option isn't a realistic one. Through that people began to act nonviolently, and discover the importance of what this whole process is about in Latin America.

Unfortunately, news of such significant developments is found only in the pacifist press.