VOLUME XXXIV, NO. 36
SEPTEMBER 9, 1981

GROUNDS OF PERSUASION

MOST arguments involve the more or less conscious manipulation of illusions. Humans have *feelings* about what is good and what is bad, often proceeding in their contentions as though their feelings were established fact. If we knew how to separate the feelings we have into two classes—those which are innate, and those which we have adopted because so many other people have them—we'd be better able to distinguish good from bad arguments. This would change the pursuit of truth into a problem of moral psychology, since we could then identify the nature of our own conflicting feelings and make a few decisions about them.

Study of history helps us to reach this point. From history we learn to understand why the arguments of Adam Smith and John Locke had such strong appeal in the eighteenth century; and from inspection of the present scene we see why their logic no longer holds us captive. Of course, there are those who still live in a psychological eighteenth century, and who fail to realize that Smith and Locke, being intelligent men, would have different views if they were alive today.

Well, *what* would they think? It is difficult to say. In our time opinion is in flux. It is a time when one world-view is dying and another coming to birth, therefore a time of confusion. The air is filled with argument.

An essay may be better than an argument. An argument is a form of address by a person who believes he is right. He moves from assumptions which he believes are shared by a goodly number, pointing to the conclusions he has reached, and attempting to show by logic and illustration how he has reached them. He wants to get people to do particular things. He values this accomplishment more than he values the pursuit of abstract or generalized truth. We are faced, he says, with a condition, not a theory. There is surely a sense in which he is right. That there may be other ways of being right does not much interest him.

The essayist is not out to prove anything in particular, but to suggest various possibilities which have occurred to him, which *seem* like solvents for some of the confused thinking in the world. All he wants is to get a few more people to adopt the stance of the essayist. The essayist, of course, makes his own sort of argument. His appeal is gentle, yet has a wiry strength. He tries to spread his growing suspicion of popular "tracts for the times."

Here is a passage from a remarkably capable essayist, W. Macneile Dixon, who knows how to make persuasive use of illustrations. He wrote in *The Human Situation* (the Gifford Lectures, 1935-37):

> The wise folk who know what is best for the world are to be congratulated. To know that you are a prophet of the Lord is a great thing—to have no doubts. It is a great thing to be so deep in His counsels that you can speak *ex cathedra,* and hand over delinquents and dissentients to the executioner.
>
> The passion for reforming one's neighbours out of existence, or at least out of the existence they prefer—and the two are often found together—afflicts even more grievously those who have lost their faith in God than those who believe in Him. The seceders to the church of the ethical idealists, having dispossessed God of His authority, are at no loss to replace Him. They mount the vacant throne, deify their own consciences, would have men bow and worship their ideals, and proceed to establish a tyranny more irksome than that of their ecclesiastical predecessors,
>
> More haughty and severe in place
> Than Gregory or Boniface.
>
> "Be my brother, or I will slay you." *Sois mon frère ou je te tue.* Who conferred upon them this astounding magistracy? What, one wonders, do our

> reformers propose to do with men in whom the opposites are in startling evidence, with a man, let us say, like Charles James Fox, who made his great speeches in the Commons on nights between those he spent in gambling and drinking? "The most brilliant debater," said Burke, "the world ever saw"—"all fire and simplicity and sweet temper," in Creevey's words, "perfectly exempt," in Gibbon's, "from any taint of malevolence or vanity or falsehood." This man spent a quarter of a million on cards and wine before he was twenty-five, and fiercely resented any interference with his personal habits. He would lose £16,000 on Tuesday night, speak in the House on Thursday on the *Thirty-Nine Articles,* sit up drinking the remainder of the day at White's and win £6,000 before leaving for Newmarket on Friday. This was also the man who fought all his life for every liberal principle, for toleration and Catholic emancipation, and who during office abolished the slave trade. What do you propose to do with such a human volcano? Would you replace him by some bloodless respectability? Perhaps our reformers cherish the secret hope that nature has ceased to produce such men. Let us hope, they pray, that God or nature will refrain from making these upsetting people; another Napoleon, for example, the most splendid genius, Acton thought, who ever trod the earth, who yet had few scruples, sacrificed two million lives had none the less legions of devoted followers, and built himself a pyramid of remembrance which will crumble only with human memory, who in his own words, wanted the empire of the world, and the world invited him to take it. The reformers will no doubt see to it that budding Napoleons may be early discovered and strangled in their cradles.

Dixon, obviously, isn't trying to get anyone to *do* anything. Except perhaps to take pause now and then, and think. Yet he has a kind of goal, if no destination, which comes out clearly enough in his last chapters. What sort of person would be one who has reached that goal?

The question suggests an illustration. Francisco Varela, a Chilean, has repeated in the *Journal of the New Alchemists* (No. 6) the brooding that the recent civil war in his country compelled him to do. His friends were tortured and killed in that conflict, which ended Allende's life and the lives of 80,000 others. At the close of his reflections Varela wrote that what men think of as "knowledge" determines what they do.

> So it is not an abstract proposition for me when I say that we must incorporate in the enactment, in the projecting out of our world views, *at the same time* the sense in which that projection is only one perspective, that it is a relative frame, that it must contain a way to undo itself. And unless we find a way of creating expressions of that nature, we are going to be constantly going around in the same circle. Whether that can be done or not I do not know. . . . My deep conviction is that we must try to see to what extent our political views and our projections on the world can express this form of relativity, the fact that every position we take will also contain the opposite one. That ultimately I cannot follow a form of political action that is based on truth any more. I cannot say my political stance is true as opposed to yours, which is false. But every political stance contains the elements on which the truth of the other is based, and all that we are doing is a little dance. Sure, I have to take this side, and that is cool, but how do I really embody in that action that I acknowledge the importance of the other side and the essential brotherhood between those two positions? How can I go to Pinochet and say, "Hello my brother"? I don't know. I don't think that I am that enlightened at all. I wouldn't be able to do that, but in some sense I realize that is a great limitation. That should be in some sense possible.

What can you do with an attitude like that? It will never win an election. It will not be persuasive to either the Rev. Jerry Falwell or the fellow who writes the ads for Mobil Oil. But Varela's point is that while we may take a "side"—what seems to us the practical, working, "right side" in a current controversy—there is always some truth on the other side, even if the people there don't understand how to use or preserve it. Chuang tse set the problem quite simply:

> Great knowledge sees all in one;
> Small knowledge breaks down into the many.

We feel ourselves—sometimes—as parts of the One, but we are hurting as members of the many, and when you set out to do something about it, the action is likely to make trouble for somebody else. It is a moral problem, an intellectual problem, and a social problem, and becomes the raw material of all philosophy worth reading, all art worth beholding. It made the drama of Tolstoy's career, summarized by Isaiah

Berlin in an epigram by an old Greek. "The fox," said Archilochus, "knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." We are all mixtures of hedgehog and fox, usually more one than the other, but, so long as we remain human, both are there. Tolstoy gave precise attention to fact—his writing has its verisimilitude from his awareness of detail, of the unique grain of existence—but his struggle to unite all the many things in the one big thing gave him his power. He didn't succeed—who does?—but he found some marvelous balances and his art lay in making us feel them, too.

Who can measure the leverage exercised on thought by this man? Who can explain his genius with any clarity? One other, a man who died the year before Tolstoy was born, also a great artist, William Blake, pursued the same struggle, with, perhaps, a little more success. In his notable essay, *Blake's Fourfold Vision* (Pendle Hill, 1956), Harold Goddard describes Blake's resolution of the dilemma:

> Our forefathers believed in individual salvation. We believe in social salvation. Either without the other is futile, Blake believes. Indeed, "society" and "the individual" are simply two more of those abstractions of the Reason that he abhorred. Like Heaven and Hell they must be "married" before there can be creation. Social changes founded on anything else are sterile—or rather they are pure illusion. They undo themselves. What goes out the door comes in the window. Out go the capitalists, for example, and in come the bureaucrats. "Revolutions," says Bernard Shaw, "have never lightened the burden of tyranny: they have only shifted it to another shoulder." But not so with imaginative change. Why? Because Vision uncreates evil by forgiveness. This is the theme of Blake's last great poem, *Jerusalem.*
>
> Dive down into your experience and I am sure you can bring up an incident to make this clear. Once upon a time something happened that brought you unadulterated joy. At almost the same time you chanced to be the victim of some unjust act or unprovoked attack. At an ordinary moment you would have retaliated hotly. But you were so happy you found it beyond your power to work up the wrath that all common morality called for. Blake is right. Imagination uncreates not only anger, but all the other seven deadly sins. A little of it mitigates evil. A little more forgives it. A little more yet forgets it. And still more uncreates it.
>
> I use the word "uncreate" because "forgive" and "forget" are not strong enough terms. Imagination is Dante's River of Lethe in Purgatory. It can literally obliterate. Imagination can not only cause that-which-was-not, to be; it can cause that-which-was, not to be. It is this double power to annihilate and to create that makes the imagination the sole instrument of genuine and lasting, in contrast with illusory and temporary, social change.

Goddard finds this solution adopted again and again, although only by the great. He says:

> When the greatest of the ages agree, if their agreement is not the truth, what is the truth? Take Dante, for instance. When he exchanges Virgil for Beatrice as guide he is dismissing Reason in favor of Imagination. His Paradise is simply Blake's Fourfold Vision expressed with a sustained perfection to which Blake could not pretend. Or Shakespeare. He went through a longer period of rebellion and tragedy than Blake. He, too, in his Hamlet stage, found life "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," but he emerged in the end with an identical doctrine in King *Lear* and *The Tempest.* In *The Tempest,* as I read it Prospero is the intellect, or reason, and Ariel is the imagination. While Ariel is the slave of Prospero, we have material wonders: the raising and stilling of tempests, magic banquets, weapons arrested in the air by unseen hands. But when Ariel is set free and Prospero becomes *his* servant, the spiritual miracles of forgiveness and reconciliation begin. And like Shakespeare before Blake, so Dostoevsky after him.

In an argument you pick your illustration to say one thing and one thing only. An argument weak in principle but strong in illustration may have more chance of winning than the other way around. Illustrations are of course selective and a counter-argument will use other illustrations which say something quite different. People who do "research" in behalf of winning an argument are often embarrassed when they happen to do a second cycle of research on the same subject. They have to go back and correct what they said the first time, or should. Then there is the case of weakening the argument from a good principle with a bad illustration. Thoughtful readers are

likely to shelve the illustration and find a better one of their own, since the principle appeals.

The best—the most useful—arguments are those with essay intentions mixed in. Gandhi's way of arguing was of this sort. He provided an argument about the times based on principles issuing from the eternities. He wanted India to be free of the British, not so that his countrymen could have a better, more prosperous life for themselves, but because remaining the colony of a European country seemed to inhibit the development in Indians of self-reliance and the search for a life based on Truth. It was, moreover, simply wrong for an invader to run the country. Gandhi knew that most Indians who followed him in his path of non-violent resistance did so because they had no other means of opposing the British. After the British left and Gandhi died the Sarvodaya movement shrank to small proportions, although it still bravely continues under the leadership of a persistent few.

Gandhi had an extraordinary mode of argument. He believed absolutely in non-violence yet he felt that human integrity was more important than non-violence and was needed to practice it. When friends asked him how he could reconcile his rejection of violence with the work he did with an ambulance corps for the British during World War I, he said:

> There is no defense for my conduct weighed only in the scales of *ahimsa.* I draw no distinction between those who wield the weapons of destruction and those who do redcross work. . . . Life is governed by a multitude of forces. It would be smooth sailing, if one could determine the course of one's action only by one general principle whose application at a given moment was too obvious to need even a moment's reflection. But I cannot recall a single act which could be so easily determined.
>
> Being a confirmed war resister I have never given myself training in the use of destructive weapons in spite of opportunities to take such training. It was perhaps thus that I escaped direct destruction of life. But so long as I lived under a system of government based on force and voluntarily partook of the many facilities and privileges it created for me, I was bound to help that government to the extent of my ability when it was engaged in a war unless I noncooperated with that government and renounced to the utmost of my capacity the privileges it offered me. . . . My position regarding the Government is totally different today and hence I should not voluntarily participate in its wars and I should risk imprisonment and even the gallows if I was forced to take up arms or otherwise take part in its military operations.
>
> But that does not solve the riddle. If there was a national government, whilst I should not take any direct part in any war I can conceive occasions when it would be my duty to vote for military training of those who wish to take it. For I know that all its members do not believe in non-violence to the extent I do. It is not possible to make a person or a society non-violent by compulsion.
>
> Non-violence works in a most mysterious manner. Often a man's actions defy analysis in terms of non-violence; equally often his actions may wear the appearance of violence when he is absolutely non-violent in the highest sense of the term and is subsequently found so to be. All I can then claim for my conduct is that it was, in the instances cited [ambulance work during the Boer War, World War I, and the Zulu Rebellion of 1906], actuated in the interests of non-violence. . . . I may not carry my argument further. Language at best is but a poor vehicle for expressing one's thoughts in full. For me non-violence is not a mere philosophical principle. It is the rule and the breath of my life.
>
> . . . I am painfully aware of my failings. But the Light within me is steady and clear. There is no escape for any of us save through truth and non-violence. I know that war is wrong, is an unmitigated evil. I know too that it has got to go. I firmly believe that freedom won through bloodshed or fraud is no freedom. Would that all the acts alleged against me were found to be wholly indefensible rather than that by any act of mine non-violence was held to be compromised or that I was ever thought to be in favour of violence or untruth in any shape or form! Not violence, not untruth but non-violence. Truth is the law of our being.

At what level of persuasion is Gandhi working here? Is he making an argument or writing an essay? He is saying, in effect, that so long as you belong to and have the benefits of a nation, you need to give at least limited support to

that nation; and he is saying that a truly non-violent man may sometimes appear to be violent; and he is saying that he is himself imperfect in his practice of non-violence. This is not, a public relations man would say, the way to win arguments. Yet the impact of Gandhi's thinking on the twentieth century has been immeasurable. Can we call it the impact of *truth?* It was Tolstoy's truth, too, and Thoreau's. And Martin Luther King's.

In abstraction, it is the truth that Cervantes declared when he said that the road is better than the inn, and that Lessing repeated, saying, "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." Possession, he added, "makes one content, indolent, proud."

The truths of yesterday are dying all the time, since they were focused in yesterday's forms of experience and their accompanying illusions. Growth in knowledge comes with the shattering of illusions and the testing of vision. Tomorrow's truth may be threaded throughout untested vision. The truths which arise from our feeling for the One and assume the dress of the time—call them hedgehog truths—have no bottom line. Naturally enough, those who think only about the times ignore them. In this case the ground of persuasion becomes obscure.

REVIEW
GEORGE STEINER ON AMERICA

IN "The Archives of Eden," a paper which occupies thirty-three pages of the Fall-Winter, 1980-81 number of *Salmagundi* (published by Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, N.Y. 12866), George Steiner attempts a delineation of "the American mind," first remarking—

> At the very best, one will generalize and drop names in an impressionistic register of guesswork and prejudice. This is exactly what I shall do: to generalize, to drop names. But what other method is there? How else does any critique or inventory of values proceed?

After this somewhat disarming preface, Mr. Steiner argues that American culture, literary, and artistic achievement are rooted in Europe and nourished by Europe, whether it be philosophy, music, mathematics, science, or the novel and poetry. America is more of a caretaker, he suggests, than an originator in literature and the arts and sciences—a caretaker and an elaborator. And a promoter. What is distinctive about the United States is the grand scale of these "marketing" functions:

> No society has ever declared and fulfilled a comparable commitment to advanced schooling in the liberal arts, in the social and natural sciences, in technology and the performing arts. No other society has ever opened the doors of the academy to almost anyone desiring entrance. And though the relations between the "academic" and the "cultural" are undoubtedly complex and even at various moments polemic the plain fact remains: millions of young and not-so-young Americans (consider night-schools, centers of continuing education, community colleges of every kind) are engaged in systematic study of the arts and the sciences on a timescale, in a context of public fiscal support, with access to libraries and laboratories, studios and planetaria, picture-galleries and concert-halls, undreamt-of in history. In short: Americans are engaged, like no other society, in a general pursuit of intellectual and artistic attainment in establishments of tertiary education. Nor does any other society rival the continuity of impulse which reaches out from these establishments into the life of the adult. The alumnus with his financial, but also intellectual and heuristic stake in the forward-life of the college or university which he has attended, is a singularly American phenomenon. It has been said that Oxford and Cambridge colleges own land whereas American colleges own loyalties. In recent years, in midst of a recession, such institutions as Stanford and Princeton have raised capital from their alumni on a scale which equals the entire budget for higher education in a number of European countries.

This sounds complimentary—indeed, too much so—but is not so intended, since the quantitative measures applied here reveal nothing of what Mr. Steiner regards as the cultural heart of the matter. The great in the arts and literature are always few, and authentic culture is careful to make them the source of standards. Americans fail in this. Going back to the Greeks for his first example of European practice, he says:

> The Periclean vision of the essential worth of a society in terms of its intellectual, spiritual, artistic radiance, the Socratic-Platonic criterion of the philosophically-examined individual life and of a hierarchy of civic merit in which the intellect stood supreme were, presumably, formulated and codified "from above." But collective accord in this vision, whether spontaneous or conventional, is an authentic feature in classical and European social history. What we can reconstruct of communal participation in medieval art and architecture, of the passionate outpouring of popular interest in the often competitive, agonistic achievements of Renaissance artists and men of learning, of the complex manifold of adherence which made possible the Elizabethan theatre audience, is not nostalgic fiction.

Steiner finds the mainspring of American culture not in the "Periclean vision," but in the economic value-system.

> The central and categorical imperative that to make money is not only the customary and socially most useful way in which a man can spend his earthly life—an imperative for which there is, certainly, precedent in the European mercantile and pre-capitalist ethos—is one thing. The eloquent conviction that to make money is also the most *interesting* thing he can do, is quite another. And it is precisely this conviction which is singularly American (the only culture, correlatively, in which the beggar carries no aura of sanctity or prophecy). The consequences are, literally, incommensurable.

> The ascription of monetary worth defines and democratizes every aspect of professional status. The lower-paid—the teacher, the artist out of the limelight, the scholar—are the object of subtle courtesies of condescension not, or not primarily, because of their failure to earn well, but because this failure makes them less *interesting* to the body politic.

This seems devastating enough, but Mr. Steiner is not done with us. He adds:

> That there should be Halls of Fame for baseball players but no complete editions of classic American authors; that an American university of accredited standing should, very recently, have dismissed thirty tenured teachers on grounds of utmost fiscal crisis while flying its football squads to Hawaii for a single game; that the athlete and the broker, the plumber and the pop-star, should earn far more than the pedagogue—these are facts for which we can cite parallels in other societies, even in Periclean Athens or the Florence of Galileo. What we cannot parallel is the American resolve to proclaim and to institutionalize the valuations which underlie such facts. It is the sovereign candour of American philistinism which numbs a European sensibility it is the frank and sometimes sophisticated articulation of a fundamentally, of an ontologically *immanent* economy of human purpose.

But then, to temper his blast, Mr. Steiner proposes that perhaps the Americans are simply more honest than the Europeans—they believe in acquisitive principles and will not pretend to believe otherwise. *"It may be,"* he says, *"that America has quite simply been more truthful about human nature than any previous society. If this is so, it will have been the evasion of such truth, the imposition of arbitrary dreams and ideals from above, which has made possible the high places and moments of civilization."*

The question. that runs through this discussion by Mr. Steiner is one that has haunted the modern age. It appears in the memoirs of Alexander Herzen (as noted elsewhere by Steiner) and in Americanized form in Lyman Bryson's *The Next America,* and various other places: Can high culture survive only by submitting to elitist hierarchy and aristocratic structure? Mr. Steiner, although somberly, votes for democratic rule. He says:

> The preference of democratic endeavor over authoritarian caprice, of an open society over one of creative hermeticism and censorship, of a general dignity of mass status over the perpetuation of an elite (often inhumane in its style and concerns), is, I repeat, a thoroughly justifiable choice. It very likely represents what meagre chances there are for social progress and a more bearable distribution of resources. He who makes this choice and lives accordingly deserves nothing but attentive respect. What is puerile hypocrisy and opportunism is the stance, the rhetoric, the professional practice of those—and they have been legion in American academe or the media—*who want it both ways.* Of those who profess to experience, to value, to transmit authentically the contagious mystery of great intellect and art while they are in fact dismembering it or packaging it to death.

Mr. Steiner contrasts with this complacent pretense the barbarous honesty of the totalitarian censors—men who recognize the threat to their authority in the line of a sonnet, in an essay on Hegel, in a painting by Kandinsky.

> To imprison a man because he quotes *Richard III* during the 1937 purges, to arrest him in Prague today because he is giving a seminar on Kant, is to gauge accurately the status of great literature and philosophy. It is to honour perversely, but to honour nevertheless, the obsession that is truth.
>
> What text, what painting, what symphony could shake the edifice of American politics? What act of abstract thought really matters at all? Who *cares?*
>
> Today, the question is this: which carries the greater threat to the conception of literature and intellectual argument of the first order—the apparatus of political oppression in Russia and Latin America (currently the most brilliant ground for the novelist), the sclerosis in the meritocracy and "classicism" of old Europe *or* a consensus of spiritual-social values in which the television showing of "Holocaust" is interrupted every fourteen minutes by commercials, in which gas-oven sequences are interspersed and financed by ads for panty-hose and deodorants?

The question, as Mr. Steiner admits, is "overwrought," yet remains one needing reply. Those who attempt an answer may find it necessary to go far afield from conventional

measures of cultural excellence. Have, for example, the Gandhians lost their "high culture"? If you read a little in Vinoba, you will not think so. Should culture be redefined in terms of the intuitive perceptions of common folk—as Tolstoy insisted?

There are other questions which hover in the background, questions too long omitted in intellectual discourse. Is it possible that in America, in epochs to come, worthy answers will emerge, not in treatises on art and literature, but in the everyday practice of sober craftsmen, in the "culture" of tomorrow's responsible agriculturalists? Is it fair to say that American society or civilization is still locked in its adolescent phase—a stubbornly protracted adolescence, no doubt—and that its present tortured artistic and literary expressions are by no means representative of future possibilities?

COMMENTARY
REPORT FROM MINNESOTA!

THERE may still be places in America where poverty is not degrading (see the end of the "Children" article), but consider the situation of some older women on Skid Row in Los Angeles, described in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (Oct. 28, 1980 issue, sent to us by a reader in Minnesota) by Jilleen Halverson. She runs the Downtown Women's Center, which she started two years ago, "as a place women could come to without being harassed by government forms, social workers or religious preaching." Jill Halverson graduated from St. Cloud (Minn.) State University in 1963, then joined the Peace Corps in India. She also counseled high school dropouts in New Jersey, and after that worked in the Los Angeles slums on alcohol and welfare programs. Seeing what really needed to be done, she took her savings and (with other contributions) opened the Women's Center, known as Jill's Place. "She does not want government money."

What are the needy ladies like? Miss Halverson saw that they were "hidden, unseen, and lacked a place to go." Skid Row is a "20-block downtown area with a population of 10,000 including the poor, the elderly, the alcoholics, the prostitutes, and in many cases the hopeless." The ladies are "women of all ages and backgrounds who were often afraid to go to the male-dominated missions for food or care." One of them is "Rose who lives in a parking lot with all her life's possessions in two shopping bags." And "there is 65-year-old Carrie whom she found living on the sidewalk, sleeping under a plastic tarp, her body infested with lice." "They're my family," Miss Halverson said. Jill's place is a "light, bright, pretty and comfortable" building (she renovated it) where about 50 visitors come seven days a week. It's open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

> Carrie is one of her favorites. The elderly woman was so miserable at one point with problems including lice that she told Halverson "If I knew an easy way to commit suicide, I'd kill myself." Halverson convinced Carrie to go through treatment to get rid of the lice. The procedure was painful since they had eaten parts of her arms and chest raw. Halverson also helped her get Social Security and found her a motel room to live in, rather than sleeping on the street.

Jilleen Halverson has no plans for expansion. The place is now working well in human terms and she wants to continue that way. The address of the Downtown Women's Center is 325 So. Los Angeles St., Los Angeles, Calif. 90012.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE SLANT OF THE CULTURE

LIKE other editorial desks, this Department accumulates numerous pieces of paper, requiring, at least semi-annually, half a day for cleaning house. This way rediscoveries of good material are made. A recent find was an article by Peter Marin in the *Saturday Review* for July 2, 1971, in which he reports some conferences on the "free schools" of that time. His account of meetings in New Orleans and Tulane—Marin and other participating "experts" had come at the invitation of students in the universities there—are interesting, but what seems most valuable are his conclusions about such gatherings. He says of a "workshop" in New Orleans:

> I wonder how it is that education has come to bear the sheer and terrible weight of so many adult concerns? I did not see how in that babble of groups and voices we might find a common language or ground. The event had no form, no center, no focus; it was all edges and peripheries: 150 people with 150 separate concerns, collected to sell their wares and solve their problems—but not really interested in finding out what, if anything, they had in common. . . . Some people wandered from group to group, as at a trade fair. Others joined one group and stayed with it to the end. My workshop, called Beyond Education, or something like that, seemed evenly divided between older and younger persons. The participants tried to discover just how and where one's own education *really* takes place, and just what and who in the present world can help us, and others, to survive. That is:
>
> *If our culture is, as it seems to be, without convincing purpose or structure, then how do we learn to live in it and prepare our children for it?*
>
> Or:
>
> *If the meaning of all acts and relations is uncertain, then how do we help the young to become the creators of meaning: those who resignify the nature of all things?*
>
> We made some progress, but it was tough going. The narrow and restrictive nature of the *language* of education does not allow easy discussion of the full concerns or experiences of people. And people seem to lack a language of their own. They have been overschooled, institutionalized, and they can think about children only in terms of schools. Complex questions about political power, religion and meaning, family and social structure, intrude themselves, but they cannot be discussed with clarity, for all are couched in "educational" terms. Powerless politically, disheartened spiritually, culturally whirled about without reason, those in the workshop still sought an answer to the nation's and their private woes through the schools, as if (familiar myth) we might somehow set right in the classroom the dislocations of the age. Yet when it came to speaking directly about those dislocations, or about their own lives, the participants fell silent into cliches. Whatever they said about education made little sense, for very little of it was connected in an organic way to the truths of their own lives or the lives of the young.

After another session, in which Ron Gross spoke of going outside the limits of schooling and forming groups for self-education and community learning, and Michael Rossman said that what we actually learn has little to do with what happens in school, and Peter Marin declared that "our collective survival depends on our learning to receive one another individually as comrades or friends outside of the state's institutions," he (Marin) described the reactions of the audience:

> In general, the urban free schoolers seemed aggrieved by what we said. All of us may have appeared to be criticizing them, along with all schooling. At times the New Orleanians were probably mildly edified, but generally they seemed dazed and bored. The only notable remarks were made by [Edgar] Friedenberg, who defended my soft-edged statements about tenderness. He suggested that a culture such as ours, which may indeed have little tenderness toward children or life in general, is unable to invent any kind of schooling that will not damage the young. He meant to point out, of course, that the problem does not lie in pedagogy itself but more deeply in the heart and the slant of the culture, and that remedies like open classrooms and free schools, though improvements, are by no means sufficient to restore to childhood and adolescence the elements of trust, depth, stability, conviction, grace, etc., that have been bred from them.

Now comes a delighting comment:

> In any case, the evening didn't turn out badly. People in the audience gradually began to talk about what was happening in New Orleans, and the conversation among them was specific, heated, useful, and far more intelligent than what we, the experts, had been saying for the past few days. As one of the local people later said: "It took us three days to see that you people didn't know anything more about education than we did, and so we

found out that we had to do it all for ourselves.". . . As for us, the experts, we were by then sitting and standing among the seats of the auditorium, still carrying on our own arguments. The turnabout had been complete: They were on the stage, and we were in the seats. It had the neat symmetry of theater—which much, if not all, of the conference had been.

The last conference Peter Marin tells about was at the University of New Mexico, where he, Robert Coles, Judson Jerome, and Dennis Sullivan held forth. They all pointed out that the university cuts students off from life.

I spoke about the university and its diminishment of being, its control of consciousness, its monopoly on meaning. We were all very eloquent. But when the students themselves spoke, they could mobilize energy about only one issue: *grades*. They felt that eliminating grades would clear up everything else. So there we were: theorizing, exhorting, and, like visionary prophets, trying to move them. And they were, trapped in the reality of their condition, unable to see beyond grades. So much distance between our concerns and theirs, our words and theirs, our vision and their pragmatic reality!

Peter Marin concludes:

Perhaps in God's eyes they all fit together, but for the moment I have some doubts. What disturbed me in New Mexico was what was disturbing in New Orleans: the increasing inability of all sides in the great debate to find a language, a bridge, to connect their various concerns and see them, together, in the light of what we will go through these next few decades.

Such a language is both necessary and possible, but it is not the language we now use about schools, and it is not to be found in the rhetoric of pedagogy. This lack of a common language, together with our difficulties in putting aside our theories and talking to one another as concerned persons, interfered with our efforts in New Orleans. . . .

I have stressed the distances between people and their difficulties in finding an adequate and common language. But all of that is natural to the age, and I hope nothing I've said obscures the admiration I feel for the kinds of activity one generally finds in free schools. Beneath all their differences these people at least share a commitment to find alternatives to massive, impersonal institutions and to struggle to make sense of the complex ideas of freedom and community. One should not forget how lovely and crucial that struggle is.

Interesting evidence that the problems described by Peter Marin are not a peculiarly American ill comes in a paper on Rabindranath Tagore by Devi Prasad, who observes in one place:

Tagore said that the highest education is that which does not merely give us information but which brings our lives in harmony with all existence. And it is this education that is being systematically neglected in the school system (in India). From the very beginning information is forced into the minds of children so that they are alienated from nature. [Tagore wrote:] "We rob the child of his earth to teach geography, of language to teach him grammar. His hunger is for the Epic, but he is supplied with chronicles of facts and dates. He was born in the human world, but is banished into the world of living gramophones, to expiate for the original sin of being born in ignorance. Child-nature protests against such calamity with all its power of suffering, subdued at last into silence by punishment."

. . . When Tagore started his school he introduced simple living essentially as an educational principle. Many critics claimed that he was glorifying poverty and taking back the inmates of his ashram to the medieval ages. Tagore, however, was certain that luxuries are burdens for children. They are actually the burden of other people's habits, the burdens of vicarious pride and pleasure which parents enjoy through their children. He argued that poverty was the school in which humankind had its first lessons and its best training. "Even a millionaire's son has to be born helplessly poor and to begin his lesson of life from the beginning. He has to learn to walk like the poorest of children, though he has means to afford to be without the appendage of legs. Poverty brings us into complete touch with life and the world, for living richly is living mostly by proxy, thus living in a lesser world of reality. This may be good for one's pleasure and pride, but not for one's education. Wealth is a golden cage in which the children of the rich are bred into artificial deadening of their powers Therefore in my school, much to the disgust of the people with expensive habits, I had to provide for this great teacher—this bareness of furniture and material—not because it is poverty, but because it leads to personal experience of the world.

It seems important to note that in the United States it has become quite difficult to here, does not return us to a natural life.

FRONTIERS

Another Way

WE quote a lot of impressive figures in MANAS articles. Statistics reveal the "big picture." They have shock value, and people may be moved by them to take some sort of action. That, at any rate, is the theory of using figures. It is also the fashion in a scientific age, or what was once called a scientific age.

There is substance in claims made for figures—how much we don't know. Reading recently in a memoir about Southern California, the work of a poet set down close to thirty years ago, we wondered if another mode of telling what is happening might not be more important—more persuasive, that is, in a way that is not statistical, yet in the long run does more to improve the figures than anything else.

The memoir—we won't call it a continental obituary—is Hildegard Flanner's *A Vanishing Land*, issued in 1980 by No Dead Lines, 241 Bonita, Portola Valley, Calif. 94025—price, $6.00. A preface by the author gives the reason for wondering about the use of figures and what may be a better way to affect the feeling and thinking of readers. She says:

> *A Vanishing Land* was written many years ago when Southern California was in the midst of the dramatic social and economic changes that left it irrevocably altered. The statistics gathered at the time are left in place. In their day they were striking and conspicuous as contemporary historical data of the region. They were then positive, and they are now dissolved, their substance and point gone except for contrast, a contrast that is quickly altered and dissolved in turn. The only reality today is acceleration, as Carey McWilliams has said. In a world of acceleration thoughtful people have lost pride in numbers and fear them as a menace that will drive us into space. Once settled there we would have to take leave of what is dear to us on earth. It would follow that a few alarms and tremblings of the heart would become fashionable or at least permitted, as I trust they may be permittted in the pages that follow.
>
> In any case, to get at the truth, we need not be wholly dependent on statistics, dazzling though they may be. To a woman like myself, who can't count very well, it is much better to depend on more reliable evidence. And now, after so many years, I am sure I was right. Statistics have changed uncontrollably but my emotions are the same—wistful, shocked, rebellious.

We spoke earlier of the need to affect the thinking of people and wondered how this sort of writing might work. But this is wrong. Hildegard Flanner isn't writing to convert. Her work is both celebration and lament. The symmetries of her small essay—fifty pages—are neither didactic nor polemic. Its art is in conveying nuance. But what may escape the casual reader is that nuance becomes mood, the mood a stance, and the stance may generate a principle. Only people of principle are able to alter history in ways that help.

In her preface alone there is more understanding of what has happened to Southern California than in hundreds of pages of sociological report, in which actual meanings may be lost in the palimpsest of detail. Looking back over the years, the writer says:

> There were occasions when a single incident possessed for me the solid core of statistics, and far more human emphasis. I was walking one afternoon and as I passed a house in our neighborhood the front door flew open and a man emerged. Immediately he slammed the door, turned around and kicked it, and kicked it again and continued kicking it until he had splintered the wood and made a jagged hole in it. The incident occurred quickly and I saw it all as I passed, trying to appear nonchalant and without curiosity. He could have broken his ankle, and would it have been worth the pleasure of the fury? My thoughts became involved in what I had just seen. This is the way it begins, I said. A year ago it was chaparral here and quail running around to look after their children, and once in a while in the gravel a fine horned toad. Then somebody built a house. Goodbye, quail. Adiós horned toad. And somebody, new people, moved into the house. Soon they are fighting and he kicks in the front door. This is the beginning, this is the rough moment when the nervousness and rancor of the big city down there in the valley starts to break out into the remoteness and peace of the foothills. Now incoherence and

> mishandling of a human relationship had come to a climax in the kicking of the front door. . . .

Well, a social scientist may say, looking up from his table of the statistics of crime in the Los Angeles area, that's simply an effect of crowding, or he will have a more elaborate theory. There's truth in his explanation, but look away from it to some other crowded areas of the world—to Japan, for example. While the Japanese people are already deeply infected with the commercial and urban fevers of the West, there is still good evidence of what a society governed by mood and nuance may do to cope with such problems. They develop manners—exquisite manners. The privacies of life are protected by manners from the pressures of crowds. Other good things, too, are preserved. Which is more important—meeting a difficult condition with good heart, or composing learnedly objective treatises filled with statistics defining problems that cannot be solved?

Among other things, poets teach manners. Children begin with manners and eventually develop attitudes from them. Some things seem to happen backwards for the young. For the young, the *Gita* is only an adventure story, for the old the highest philosophy. When such sequences are lost, so is the civilization. It looks bad, these days, for both ourselves and Japan.

The poets nonetheless do what they can, and the poet's voice, unlike the statistician's gloomy appraisals, has always an unsung counterpoint of modest hope:

> As landmarks disappear and give way to the outstretching deposit of metropolitan energies in new centers of industrial and suburban life, it could be only a person sealed awe from time who could fail to sense the enormous grip of vitality and fatigueless history in so much change and replacement. It is true that our pattern of expansion and progress follows, but to excess, the abrupt conventions of progress in any great metropolitan area, but with a fate difference. In a region as beautiful as this, progress has been a catastrophe. Well . . . a catastrophe to the wistful minority, those citizens who still think that a fine length of excellent scenery in bright clean air and a valley of good agricultural earth supporting an established way of life were too much to give in exchange for the common turbulence of growth, the repetitious miles of junky commerce along our city boulevards and between-city highways, and the costly discouraging problems of corrosive smog. These few dissident ones should not be mistaken for dreamers. They are realists who know the price they are paying for another's gain.

Poets are better than statisticians in giving a new meaning to the idea of gain. The statisticians, if they are able to get across enough of their truths, may lead us into bloody conflicts, with ample justification in bottomline figures to moralize their wrath and the retribution it seeks. The poets know another way; some day they may be heard.