

ALBERT CAMUS

THE life-span of Albert Camus, from 1913 to 1960—he died at forty-seven in an automobile accident—covered a time which might be named the Disgrace of the World, or of the Western World. He was born in French Algeria and grew up in the Belcourt district of Algiers where working people lived. His father was killed in 1914, in the battle of the Marne of the first world war, and his mother, who could not read or write supported her children (Albert and his brother Lucien) by housecleaning. Throughout his life Camus suffered attacks of tuberculosis, yet in his early youth he excelled in athletics.

There were no books in his home—not even a magazine or a newspaper—yet as a child in school the boy commanded the attention of his class when he spoke. His biographer, Herbert Lottman, relates in *Albert Camus* (Braziller, 1980) that "he could also go off by himself to nearby Arsenal Beach to declaim poetry with pebbles in his mouth, as he had been told that Demosthenes had done." At seven, he later told a friend, he wanted to be a writer, and at twenty-four—after devoted work in informal theater in Algiers and about two years in the Communist Party (he was expelled in 1937)—he came to realize, his biographer says, "that his real work was to create books out of the life he was living." In his acceptance of the Nobel Prize in 1957, he said that "the writer's function is not without arduous duties. By definition he cannot serve today those who make history; he must serve those who are subject to it."

Late in 1943 Pascal Pia recruited Camus to work on *Combat*, the French Resistance underground newspaper. Camus was then in France, having left his school-teaching job in Oran and migrated to Lyon to recover from an attack of tuberculosis. Lottman describes the work of getting out *Combat*:

. . . perhaps the first published in the capital was number 49, dated October 15, 1943 (but printed sometime before that, since clandestine printing and distribution required so much time). That issue contains a letter from Charles de Gaulle and a story about the liberation of Corsica. For each issue, the layout had to be perfect before it was sent to press; words had to be counted, for example, for no editor would be available at the underground printing plant. The method employed at the time was to set the type and make up the newspaper pages, then to reproduce them by photogravure in reduced format, after which zinc plates were sent to printers scattered around the country. . . . Copy for the newspaper was compiled by correspondents who listened to the British radio (the BBC) and other short-wave broadcasts, or who received information from Switzerland or other foreign sources. Funds were parachuted from London earmarked for the Combat movement, sent from Free French headquarters. . . . They recruited helpers to carry supplies, distribute finished copies. Eventually they acquired bicycles for everybody because the Paris subway was so unreliable in those days. . . .

Produced in danger, with the risk of arrest, torture, and imprisonment or execution, it [*Combat*] could only serve to lift morale a mite; it could not change the course of the war. Could it change the postwar world? For active resistance workers, such as those of the Combat movement, were laboring not only to rid their country of enemy troops and of a collaborationist government; if they were making sacrifices to free France, it was because they also hoped to make a better France after the liberation. . . . In those early months Camus was transformed from an interested but casual contact of the underground—hardly more than a camp follower—into a committed activist, taking risks.

Would the "liberation" bring about what men such as Camus and his colleagues hoped for? Many of these artists and writers had cared little for politics, yet were drawn into the Resistance movement with, as Hannah Arendt said, "the force of vacuum." Then, after the struggle was over, they fell back into "the 'sad opaqueness' of a private life centered about nothing but itself."

Quoting René Char—poet and friend of Camus—Hannah Arendt notes that Char, like the others who "joined the Resistance, *found* himself," and no longer suspected himself of "insincerity," but with the war over—"they could only return to the old empty strife of conflicting ideologies which after the defeat of the common enemy once more occupied the political arena to split former comrades-in-arms into innumerable cliques which were not even factions and to engage them in the endless polemics and intrigues of a paper war."

In an interview in 1957, Camus expressed a similar feeling. In reply to a question about side-taking, he said:

Before he died in combat in the last war, Richard Hilary found the phrase that sums up this dilemma: "we were fighting a lie in the name of a half-truth." He thought he was expressing a very pessimistic idea. But one may even have to fight a lie in the name of a quarter-truth. This is our situation at present. However, the quarter-truth contained in Western society is called liberty. And liberty is the way and the only way, of perfectibility. Without liberty heavy industry can be perfected, but not justice or truth. Our most recent history, from Berlin to Budapest, ought to convince us of this. In any case, it is the reason of my choice. I have said in this very place that none of the evils totalitarianism claims to remedy is worse than totalitarianism itself. I have not changed my mind. On the contrary, after twenty years of our harsh history, during which I have tried to accept every experience it offered, liberty ultimately seems to me for societies and for individuals, for labor and for culture, the supreme good that governs all others.

Those who read Camus' works—especially the later ones, *The Rebel*, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and his plays, such as *The Just Assassins*—will know that they are in the presence of a consummate artist. Yet he had but one credo as both artist and man:

The aim of art, the aim of life can only be to increase the sum of freedom and responsibility to be found in every man and in the world. It cannot, under any circumstances, be to reduce or suppress that freedom, even temporarily. There are works of art that tend to make man conform and to convert him to some external rule. Others tend to subject him

to whatever is worst in him, to terror or hatred. Such works are valueless to me. No great work has ever been based on hatred or contempt. On the contrary, there is not a single true work of art that has not in the end added to the inner freedom of each person who has known and loved it. Yes, that is the freedom I am extolling, and it is what helps me through life. An artist may make a success or a failure of his life. But if he can tell me that, finally, as a result of his long effort, he has eased or decreased the various forms of bondage weighing upon men, then in a sense he is justified and, to some extent, he can forgive himself.

Camus was born into European civilization at a time when to be intelligent was for most persons to be an unbeliever. He was agnostic, but from intrinsic honesty, not from bitterness or angry partisanship. He struggled throughout his life to find out what he could believe in, and that struggle is more valuable to his readers than any way-station of belief. To the members of a Dominican Monastery who in 1948 had asked him to speak to them, he said that he was without the feeling that he possessed "any absolute truth or any message," and that he would never "start from the supposition that Christian truth is illusory, but merely from the fact that I could not accept it."

What, then, should Christians do—do as men, whether or not they are Christians? They should at least cry out against force and injustice.

What the world expects of Christians is that Christians should speak out loud and clear, and that they should voice their condemnation in such a way that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt, could rise in the hearts of the simplest man. That they should get away from abstraction and confront the blood-stained face history has taken on today. The grouping we need is a grouping of men resolved to speak out clearly and to pay up personally. When a Spanish bishop blesses political executions, he ceases to be a bishop or a Christian or even a man; he is a dog just like the one who, backed by an ideology, orders that execution without doing the dirty work himself. We are still waiting, and I am still waiting, for a grouping of all those who refuse to be dogs and are resolved to pay the price that must be paid so that man can be something more than a dog. . . .

Between the forces of terror and the forces of dialogue, a great unequal battle has begun. I have nothing but reasonable illusions as to the outcome of that battle. But I believe it must be fought, and I know that certain men at least have resolved to do so. I merely fear that they will occasionally feel somewhat alone, and that after an interval of two thousand years we may see the sacrifice of Socrates repeated several times. The program for the future is either a permanent dialogue or the solemn and significant putting to death of any who have experienced dialogue. After having contributed my reply, the question that I ask Christians is this: "Will Socrates still be alone and is there nothing in him and in your doctrine that urges you to join us?"

Unable to express himself optimistically as to any future he could see, Camus was charged with pessimism by both the Communists and the Christians. He replied:

I was not the one to invent the misery of the human being or the terrifying formulas of divine malediction. I was not the one to shout *Nemo bonus* or the damnation of unbaptized infants. I was not the one who said that man was incapable of saving himself by his own means and that in the depths of his degradation his only hope was in the grace of God. And as for the famous Marxist optimism! No one has carried distrust of man further, and ultimately the economic fatalities of this universe seem more terrible than divine whims.

Christians and Communists will tell me that their optimism is based on a longer range, that it is superior to all the rest, and that God or history, according to the individual, is the satisfying end-product of their dialectic. I can indulge in the same reasoning. If Christianity is pessimistic as to man, it is optimistic as to human destiny. Well, I can say that, pessimistic as to human destiny, I am optimistic as to man. And not in the name of a humanism that always seemed to me to fall short, but in the name of an ignorance that tries to negate nothing.

This means that the words "pessimism" and "optimism" need to be clearly defined and that, until we can do so, we must pay attention to what unites us rather than to what separates us.

From the time when, as a boy, he learned what had happened to his father (who was killed when Albert was seven months old), after he had witnessed the execution of the murderer of an

entire family, Camus was firmly opposed to capital punishment. His father, outraged by the crime of killing children, had felt that the penalty was just and he went to watch the punishment. But when he came home he would tell his family nothing. "He threw himself onto the bed, and suddenly began to vomit." More than forty years later, in "Reflections on the Guillotine," Camus began with this story, told him by his mother, then said:

He [his father] had just discovered the reality hidden under the noble phrases with which it was masked. Instead of thinking of the slaughtered children, he could think of nothing but that quivering body that had just been dropped onto a board to have its head cut off.

Presumably that ritual act is horrible indeed if it manages to overcome the indignation of a simple, straightforward man and if a punishment he considered richly deserved had no other effect in the end than to nauseate him. When the extreme penalty simply causes vomiting on the part of the respectable citizen it is supposed to protect, how can anyone maintain that it is likely, as it ought to be, to bring more peace and order into the community? Rather, it is no less repulsive than the crime, and this new murder, far from making amends for the harm done to the social body, adds a new blot to the first one.

This essay against capital punishment first appeared in 1957 in company with a similar but longer work by Arthur Koestler. Earlier, Camus had written "Neither Victims Nor Executioners," which was translated into English by Dwight Macdonald and published in Macdonald's *Politics* for July-August 1947. Occupying only six (large) pages, this call for an end to killing has great persuasive power. Camus wrote:

What with the general fear of war now being prepared by all nations and the specific fear of murderous ideologies, who can deny that we live in a state of terror? We live in terror because persuasion is no longer possible; because man has been wholly submerged in History; because he can no longer tap that part of his nature, as real as the historical part, which he recaptures in contemplating the beauty of nature and of human faces; because we live in a world of abstractions, of bureaus and machines, of absolute ideas and of crude messianism. We suffocate among people who think they are absolutely right, whether in

their machines or in their ideas. And for all who can live only in an atmosphere of human dialogue and sociability, this silence is the end of the world. . . .

To come to terms, one must understand what fear means, what it implies and what it rejects. It implies and rejects the same fact: a world where murder is legitimate, and where human life is considered trifling. . . . Before anything can be done, two questions must be put: "Do you or do you not, directly or indirectly, want to be killed or assaulted? Do you or do you not, directly or indirectly, want to kill or assault?"

I once said that, after the experiences of the last two years, I could no longer hold to any truth which might oblige me, directly or indirectly, to demand a man's life. Certain friends whom I respected retorted that I was living in Utopia, that there was no political truth which could not one day reduce us to such an extremity, and that we must therefore either run the risk of this extremity or else simply put up with the world as it is.

They argued the point most forcefully. But I think they were able to put such force in it only because they were unable to *imagine* other people's death. It is a freak of the times. We make love by telephone, we work not on matter but machines, and we kill and are killed by proxy. We gain in cleanliness, but lose in understanding.

Toward the end he says:

Let us suppose that certain individuals resolve that they will consistently oppose to power the force of example; to authority, exhortation; to insult, friendly reasoning; to trickery, simple honor. Let us suppose they refuse all the advantages of present-day society and accept only the duties and obligations which bind them to other men. Let us suppose they devote themselves to orienting education, the press and public opinion toward the principles outlined here. Then I say that such men would be acting not as Utopians but as honest realists. They would be preparing the future and at the same time knocking down a few of the walls which imprison us today. If realism be the art of taking into account both the present and the future, of gaining the most while sacrificing the least, then who can fail to see the positively dazzling realism of such behavior?

For my part, I am fairly sure that I have made the choice. And, having chosen, I think that I must speak out, that I must state that I will never again be one of those, whoever they may be, who compromise

with murder, and that I must take the consequences of such a decision.

Finally, he said:

To conclude: all I ask is that, in the midst of a murderous world, we agree to reflect on murder and to make a choice. After that, we can distinguish those who accept the consequences of being murderers themselves or the accomplices of murderers, and those who refuse to do so with all their force and being. Since this terrible dividing line does actually exist, it will be a gain if it be clearly marked. Over the expanse of five continents throughout the coming years an endless struggle is going to be pursued between violence and friendly persuasion, a struggle in which, granted, the former has a thousand times the chances of success than that of the latter. But I have always held that if he who bases his hopes on human nature is a fool, he who gives up in the face of circumstances is a coward. And henceforth, the only honorable course will be to stake everything on a formidable gamble: that words are more powerful than munitions.

One begins to see why Camus has been called "the conscience of his generation," and why Justin O'Brien, in his introduction to one of the books we have been quoting (*Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, Modern Library), said of him:

Over and above the intellectual and political leadership, he provided the moral guidance the postwar generation needed. By remaining flagrantly independent, he could speak out both against the Russian slave-labor camps and against U.S. support of Franco's Spain. By overcoming the immature nihilism and despair that he saw as poisoning our century, he emerged as the staunch defender of our positive moral values and of "those silent men who, throughout the world, endure the life that has been made for them."

Here was a man who, child of his time, brought to the surface in his life a spirit which would submit to no times; an artist whose lyrical voice had the strength of steel, yet whose tenderness won the hearts of all who knew him. There is a fitting testament in some lines from a rare and beautiful book, *Albert Camus and the Men of the Stone*, which tells what the French printers he worked with on *Combat* thought of him. Robert Proix, editor of the French edition

(the American version was produced by Jack Stauffacher of the Greenwood Press in San Francisco in 1971), writes of an occasion when Camus attended a proofreaders' conference:

Camus was coming back to us. We had seen him leave, go to accept the Nobel Prize. We had seen him in newspaper photos; the flashbulbs had even shown him having a fling with high society, and our hearts were heavy—were they going to keep him? No, he had come back. The bourgeoisie hadn't killed him. He was among us, with his calm smile—a little ironic, but kind, friendly, telling us not to be sentimental but to know how to be close, to be brothers. . . .

Then we began to communicate, precisely because of our agonizing concern for the truth. Here our thoughts ran along the same lines: we, proofreaders paid to "proofread" lies, dress them up grammatically, and keep them from being awkward, and he, who had been able to make the bourgeoisie retreat, even to the point of thinking—to compel it by exposure to high ideals to confess, to see itself as it really was, to get inspired, to publish and disseminate the rejection of falsehood. . . .

In this age, where hangmen triumph, Camus, or perhaps we should say the flesh-and-blood Camus, is no longer here. . . . But his ideas endure, stronger and more alive than ever. . . . In a way it's a question of whether we are going to be faithful to what is eternal in Camus.

REVIEW THE NEW ENLIGHTENMENT

THE chief thrust of Murray Bookchin's *Toward an Ecological Society* (Black Rose Books, 3981 St-Laurent Blvd., Montreal H2W 1Y5, Quebec, Canada, 1980) lies in the contention that the emergence of ecological understanding has given a new meaning to the "radical" or "revolutionary" undertaking. His chief concern is that the gathering energies of the movement for an ecological ordering of human or social life may be—already are—infected with now discredited modes of thinking and action. This book, he says at the end of his Introduction, "is primarily intended to give voice to a revolutionary idea of social change, particularly in terms of the problems that have emerged with the decline of the traditional workers' movement." He finds that a growing sense of powerlessness has led to "an all-pervasive pragmatic mentality." Politics has now openly abandoned any authentic pursuit of the social good, the goal of "the success of virtue over evil, of reason over superstition and custom," as found in Plato's *Republic*.

Politics has now become a world of evil rather than virtue, of injustice rather than justice, a world that is mediated by "lesser" versus "greater" transgression of "the good," "the right," and "the just." We no longer speak of what is "right" or "good" or "just" as *such* but what is less or more evil in terms of the "benefits" we derive, or more properly, the privations and dangers to which we are exposed. Only the general ignorance of culture that is slowly gathering like a darkening cloud over the present society has made it difficult for social theorists to understand the decisive nature of this shift in the historical norms of humanity. This shift is utterly destructive of any significant reconstruction of the body politic as an agent for achieving the historical goal of the good life, not merely as a practical ideal but as an ethical and spiritual one.

This is diagnosis of cultural ills similar in tone to that provided some years ago by John Schaar in his "Reflections on Authority" (*New American Writing*, No. 8), and an effort to free ourselves

from a number of everyday assumptions which turn attempts to right wrongs into empty gestures.

Murray Bookchin writes as an anarchist who believes that human development is meaningless unless it is characterological, the "social" problem being to produce arrangements which serve this end of individual growth instead of making its realization almost impossible. He first attracted general attention with *Our Synthetic Environment* (1963), written under the name of Lewis Herber. MANAS has been regularly quoting him over a period of nearly twenty years, for reasons that were and are self-evident. He is able to articulate a form of criticism required in a time of change, and while, sometimes, the shrillness of his contentions may be dismaying, the force of the criticism remains undiminished. He says things that need saying.

In a concluding chapter, "Spontaneity and Organization," he writes:

The point to be stressed is that we are witnessing a new Enlightenment (more sweeping even than the half-century of enlightenment that preceded the Great French Revolution) that is slowly challenging not only the authority of established institutions and values but authority as such. Percolating downward from the intelligentsia, the middle classes, and youth generally to all strata of society, this Enlightenment is slowly undermining the patriarchal family, the school as an organized system of repressive socialization, the institutions of the state, and the factory hierarchy. It is eroding the work ethic, the sanctity of property, and the fabric of guilt and renunciation that internally denies to each individual the right to the full realization of her or his potentialities and pleasures. Indeed, no longer is it merely capitalism that stands in the dock of history, but the cumulative legacy of domination that has policed the individual for thousands of years, the "archetypes" of domination, as it were, that comprise the State within our *unconscious* lives.

The enormous difficulty that arises in understanding this Enlightenment is its invisibility to conventional analyses. The new Enlightenment is not simply changing consciousness, a change that is often quite superficial in the absence of other changes. The usual changes of consciousness that marked earlier periods of radicalization could be carried quite

lightly, as mere theories, opinions, or a cerebral punditry that was often comfortably discharged outside the flow of everyday life. The significance of the New Enlightenment, however, is that it is altering the *unconscious apparatus of the individual* even before it can be articulated consciously as a social theory or a commitment to political convictions.

Bookchin wants a general reaching toward, and labors for, a utopia such as that suggested by William Morris, founded on "a new unity with nature, the abolition of hierarchy and domination, the fullness of spontaneity and the wealth of diversity." He says:

To draw up a blueprint—a "scenario"—for the realization of such a utopia would be a regression to the hidden presuppositions and the concreteness that earlier utopians opposed to the hidden presuppositions and explicit realities of their own prevailing societies. We do not need the novels, diagrams, character studies, and dialogues that the traditional utopians employed to oppose one form of everyday life to another. That everyday life must be central to the revolutionary project of our times can now be stated explicitly and rooted in a wealth of consciousness and in the commitment of revolutionaries, to their movements as cultures, not merely as organizations. More demanding than the "blueprints" of yesterday are the ecological imperatives of today. We must "phase out" our formless urban agglomerations into ecocommunities that are scaled to human dimensions, sensitively tailored in sized population, needs, and architecture to the specific ecosystems in which they are to be located. We must use our modern technics to replace our factories, agribusiness enterprises, and mines by new, human-scaled ecotechnologies that deploy sun, wind, streams, recycled wastes, and vegetation to create a comprehensible *people's technology*. We must replace the state institutions based on professional violence by social institutions based on mutual aid and human solidarity. We must replace centralized social forms by decentralized popular assemblies; representatives and bureaucracies by coordinating bodies of spokespersons with mandated administrative powers, each subject to rotation, sortition, and immediate recall.

All of this must be done if we are to resolve the ecological crisis that threatens the very existence of the biosphere in the decades that lie ahead.

How is "all this" to be accomplished? The question is answered in Bookchin's first chapter:

If we are to find the roots of the present ecological crisis, we must turn not to technics, demographics, growth, and the diseased affluence alone, we must turn to the underlying institutional, moral, and spiritual changes in human society that produced hierarchy and domination—not only in bourgeois, feudal and ancient society, nor in class societies generally, but at the very dawn of civilization.

It seems clear that the author is calling for an extraordinary act of self-transformation comparable to that proposed by great moral reformers of the past, among them both Buddha and Plato. There is a sense in which ordinary humans are asked to be heroes, just as the Grand Inquisitor reproachfully pointed out to the returned Jesus in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Will the modern world dare to adopt such an ideal? In our day Ortega gave the task a contemporary definition (in *Meditations on Quixote*):

The men of Homer belong to the same world as their desires. In Don Quixote we have, on the other hand, a man who wishes to reform reality. But is he not a piece of that reality? Does he not live off it, is he not a consequence of it? How is it possible for that which does not exist—a projected adventure—to govern and alter harsh reality? Perhaps it is not possible, but it is a fact that there are men who decide not to be satisfied with reality. Such men aim at altering the course of things, they refuse to repeat the gestures that custom, tradition, or biological instincts force them to make. These men we call heroes, because to be a hero means to be one out of many, to be oneself. The hero's will is not that of his ancestors nor of his society, but his own. This will to be oneself is heroism.

I do not think there is any more profound originality than this "practical," active originality of the hero. His life is a perpetual resistance to what is habitual and customary. Each movement he makes has first to overcome custom and invent a new kind of gesture. Such a life is a perpetual suffering, a constant tearing oneself away from that part of oneself which is given over to habit and is a prisoner of matter.

That Murray Bookchin is aware of the required individual change seems evident from what he says:

In America, any organized movement that functions with distorted goals would be infinitely worse than no movement at all. Already the "left" has inflicted an appalling amount of damage on the counter-culture, the women's liberation movement, and the student movement. With its overblown pretensions, its dehumanizing behavior, and its manipulatory practices, the "left" has contributed enormously to the demoralization that exists today. . . . The "revolutionary," no less than "the masses," embodies attitudes that reflect an inherently domineering outlook toward the external world. The western mode of perception traditionally defines selfhood in antagonistic terms, in a matrix of opposition between the objects and subjects that lie outside the "I."

In short, Bookchin proposes the overcoming of what the Buddhists term the "heresy of separateness." This is surely a major, if not a heroic, undertaking. He would probably reply that already a beginning in this direction has been made. His book supplies some of the evidence.

COMMENTARY AN ACORN OR TWO

READERS of this week's "Children" article might feel tempted to say, "Only eight or twelve students at the Land Institute. What can so few people do about the enormous dimensions of our agricultural problems?"

An answer might be that every great change is initiated by a small band of pioneers. The movement for radical reform in agriculture was begun in the first decade of this century by the British scientist, Sir Albert Howard. In the years since a handful of others have been working along similar lines, and today the harvest is beginning to come in. For example, the *Atlantic* for December has an article which explains what a number of reformers have been saying for years: That if U.S. farmers keep on raising corn the way their fathers did, the soil will continue to wash away until crop production goes down thirty to forty per cent, with little hope of recovery for generations.

Editors are beginning to take heed of such warnings. Speaking in Santa Barbara in October, John Jeavons, a present-day gardening and farming educator, pointed out this spreading concern:

United States publications have shown a great interest in big-intensive practices. Included are: *Science '80*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Organic Gardening*, the Sunday *San Francisco Chronical-Examiner*, the Sunday *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times*.

The entire issue of the Dec. 1 *Washington Spectator*, a respected and influential newsletter, was devoted to a round-up report on efforts to save "the Good Earth." The *Spectator* editor, Tristram Coffin, covered a meeting of the four hundred or more members of the Virginia Association of Biological Farmers—which began in 1977 with only eleven. He also talked to half a dozen farmers of that region who all agreed that organic farming works: it saves the soil, produces nutritious food crops, and you can make a living at it. One of these farmers told Coffin:

I had only to use synthetic fertilizers and pesticides one time to know that something wasn't right. When I met organic farmers, I was ready to make the change. To farm biologically is to understand the processes of nature and to respect our own part in this framework. My goal is to leave the soil and the farm [he has 134 working acres near Staunton, Virginia] in better condition than when I found it, making the way a little nicer for those that follow."

This is how those people think, and a reading of Lester Brown's new book, *Building a Sustainable Society* (Norton), would show how right they are.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves TWO KINDS OF LITERACY

AT the end of a long and informative preface to the Summer 1981 issue of *Dædalus*—the first of two issues of this quarterly to be devoted to "America's Schools: Public and Private"—the editor, Stephen R. Graubard, remarks:

Parents are mentioned many times in this *Dædalus* issue and always favorably. It is obvious that many of the authors [eleven in all] recognize how much parents can do to help reverse (or at least ameliorate) the present unhappy climate in which public education finds itself. No one, however, seriously considers what parents, individually and collectively, can (or do) contribute to the education of their children. If the pressures on parents are indeed growing, not least because of the changed character of work and marriage—both having become substantially more demanding and more precarious in recent years—how is all this likely to affect children, and not only those unfortunate enough to be trapped in America's central city ghettos? The family, while in no sense the uninvited guest in this educational stocktaking, is given what can be best described as a secondary or supporting role. Why is top (or at least equal) billing not offered? Is such a role no longer conceivable?

Such questions, Mr. Graubard declares, "are not asked rhetorically," yet one may point out that a variety of answers is already available in the "Teach Your Own" movement, of which John Holt is a major inspiration and publicist. While it is difficult to imagine an invitation to Holt to contribute his unsettling ideas to *Dædalus*, this is in no way a reflection on what he has to say, but indicates, rather, the limited institutional approach of the *Dædalus* contributors. Meanwhile, it has become evident, in various ways, that if the schools of the nation are to be improved, it will be necessary to go back of the schools to parents and citizens, who are initially responsible, and at this point the lethargy of the political process intrudes on the discussion.

How, then, will what needs to be done, actually *get* done, in consideration of this obstacle?

Judging from Mr. Graubard's summary of what the contributors have to say—all of it useful, both

historically and in terms of current problems—the best proposal comes from Patricia Graham, who teaches in Harvard's Graduate School of Education. The editor says:

If public education today is in serious jeopardy, as all the authors in their different ways agree, it becomes immensely important that the schools show some conspicuous success soon. The disillusion will become more dangerous the longer it is permitted to continue. Patricia Graham, in recommending that high schools make literacy their chief educational purpose—defining this as the capacity to read, communicate, compute, and make judgments—is following closely on McAndrews' plea that the schools not try to be "multipurpose agencies." If the school's primary obligation is education, the fulfilling of that purpose is a task more than sufficient for our time. If Graham's proposal seems modest, the author is under no illusions about its intrinsic difficulties. Still, she can see no other academic program that will serve to rally support. Were literacy to become *the* prime educational objective, and presuming that it could be realized, there would be a double gain: first, to students who left school knowing that they had gained some real competence, that they had in fact not been cheated; second, to the community which would become quickly aware of this success, recognizing that the schools had not attempted to do everything, but that they had done this one thing well.

This issue of *Dædalus* provides comprehensive if conventional discussion of the plight of education in America (the next issue will present "portraits of individual schools, public and private"), and readers mainly interested in the general picture might do well to read it. However, those concerned with what (some) parents are able to do are referred to John Holt's *Growing Without Schooling*, 719 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116) and his recent book, *Teach Your Own*.

There are of course other ways of thinking about education—for children and ourselves. Our society is in transition and in the changing environment in which our children will come to maturity there are areas of intensive experience which might well be added to the primary achievement of literacy—ways of thinking about land, community, and food. The young person who grows up indifferent to such matters is likely to prove a cultural illiterate in years to come.

Fortunately, there are already both competent and inspired educators now teaching as well as participating in the radical reform, in these fields. In the March-April issue of *New Farm* Wendell Berry tells about Wes Jackson and his work at the Land Institute, Salina, Kansas. Speaking of his *New Roots for Agriculture*, Berry says:

The book was written by Wes Jackson, but the life and work it comes out of belong both to Wes and his wife, Dana. Both are native Kansans of rural background. One of Dana's grandfathers drove cattle up the Chisholm Trail to Abilene. . . . Both of Wes's grandfathers came to Kansas when it was cattle country. . . . Wes grew up "on the end of a hoe handle," helping his parents, who had a diversified farm on which they grew both grain and truck crops.

Wes studied botany at the University of Kansas and later obtained a Ph.D. in genetics at North Carolina State. After some looking around Wes and Dana decided to settle in their home state, where they kept working at "the idea of a school."

Why not take on a few students? Their friend John Simpson, a neighboring attorney, politician and environmentalist, helped them raise the money to get started. Thus began the Land Institute, "a non-profit educational research organization, devoted to the study of sustainable alternatives in agriculture, energy, waste-management, and shelter."

After recovering from a devastating fire, they put up the buildings necessary to subsistence farming and added a workshop, a greenhouse, solar collectors, and windmills.

There are gardens and test plots. There is a prairie herbary, containing "perennial native and naturalized grasses and wild flowers of the prairie states"; this is to be used for teaching and research, but it is also "a savings bank" of native species. The one place is home and farm, campus, experiment station, laboratory, and museum. It is a place to live and work, teach and learn.

The major project at the Land Institute—there are others—is the development of food-bearing perennial grasses, which may take "up to 100 years." Why is this important? It may be crucially important for the future:

You can, so to speak, put a cornfield beside a plot of the native prairie (of which some few patches fortunately still survive), and you can ask another question: What's the difference? The most noticeable

difference is that whereas the soil is washing away in the cornfield, it is building in the prairie. And there is another difference that explains that one: the corn is an annual, the cornfield is an annual 'monoculture, but the dominant feature of the native prairie sod is that it is composed of a balanced diversity of perennials: grasses, legumes, sunflowers, etc., etc. The prairie is self-renewing; it accumulates ecological capital; and by its own abounding fertility and diversity it controls pests and diseases. The agribusiness corn field, on the other hand, is self-destructive; it consumes more ecological capital than it produces; and, because it is a monoculture, it invites pests and diseases.

How does the Land Institute work as a school?

Eight students per semester, they thought, would be the right number. But that turned out to mean a limit of eight new students per semester, for some usually stay over for another term: in the spring of 1981, for example, there will be twelve students. But much depends on keeping the number small: That way you don't have the exclusive categories of teachers and students.

One entrance requirement, Berry says, is "rather stringent":

"If not interested, don't come."

The curriculum does not consist of "courses" but of a set of steps repeated every semester:

1. Development of a checklist of environmental problems.
2. Attempts to analyze and understand the problems.
3. A search for new or alternative solutions.
4. Work toward an ecological ethic.

A student, at step 3, may work on a problem of energy, shelter, or waste management, but the school's primary focus is on the problem of soil loss and the development of a sustainable agriculture.

Educators with an eye on the future are likely to plan this sort of schooling for all who are looking for it. There are a few other teachers working in the same spirit, with probably more applicants than they can handle. If this temper and drive were more widespread, a lot of our educational "problems" would slowly but surely dissolve.

FRONTIERS

Peacekeeping and Self-help

RIOTS seem to be headless monsters which release pent-up resentment, anger, and desperation, accomplishing little but harm, destruction and sometimes death. It is often difficult to pinpoint the immediate cause of a riot, yet possible to sense when popular emotion is building toward an outbreak. In *Peacemaker* for September Mark Shepard describes Shanti Sena, or Peace Brigade, first proposed by Gandhi in 1922, but not brought into being until 1957, when Vinoba Bhave established this body of "peace soldiers" or Sainiks to stem the tide of riots in India at that time. Then, in 1962, leadership of Shanti Sena was assumed by Jayaprakash Narayan and Narayan Desai. Desai took part in the Bhoojan movement from 1952 to 1958, helping to collect land for landless peasants, and he is now active in education for Shanti Sena. He recently toured part of the United States, speaking on Peace Brigades and non-violent methods of resolving conflicts.

Countering the effects of rumors which often lead to rioting is a peace brigade activity. Mark Shepard says:

One group of Sainiks may take the special job of fighting rumors. Rumors play a big role in the start and build up of riots. Very often one side will attack the other in response to a false story. In the climate of fear that takes hold during a riot, stories of actual happenings quickly get distorted beyond recognition, as they pass from one person to the next:

But this is not the only way rumors spread. The Sainiks have known of groups of troublemakers traveling around a city for hours to spread these rumors. Pamphlets containing false stories are sometimes printed and distributed. The media often spread false stories. In one city the government radio asked the citizens not to drink milk because of rumors that the city's milk had been poisoned by Moslems. But in fact, the city's milk came from hundreds of sources, most of them Hindu. . . . "Shanti Sena fights rumors with facts," says Desai. When a rumor is heard, the Sainiks go to the scene of the reported incident and check out the story so they can tell the

people the truth of the matter. The facts are spread by word of mouth, daily bulletins, notices on special wallboards, and sometimes by radio.

Narayan Desai, son of Mahadev Desai, who was Gandhi's chief secretary for a quarter of a century, plans to give his time increasingly to the development of Shanti Sena and the peace brigade idea. In India the Sainiks have been especially active in seeking to avert or diminish riots between Hindus and Moslems. Mark Shepard relates:

Here is how Shanti Sena operates in a riot. Its first step is to announce it will work in the riot area. At the same time, it might make a statement about the issues involved in the riot. This statement is framed so that it doesn't place all the blame on either side, but calls on both sides to end the violence.

Over the next few days, the Shanti Sainiks ("peace soldiers") arrive in the city by train, individually and in small groups. The Sainiks are mostly part-time volunteers, usually active in other areas of the Sarvodaya ("Good of All") movement. And they are mostly Hindu—an important factor when trying to discourage a Hindu majority from violence against Moslems.

The number of Sainiks present may be only a few at first, but may grow to as many as thirty or more in the course of the operation. . . . Most of the groups patrol areas of the city where violence is likely. One group may move among the others to keep up contact. The patrols talk to people on the street, or even go door to door. They find out what is on people's minds, and begin to talk of the need to return to peace.

The patrols discourage violence, by persuasion and by their friendly presence. But they are also ready if violence breaks out. The Sainiks are prepared to rush directly between the attacking sides. Dressed in their distinctive uniforms—all white with saffron scarves—they will shout peace slogans while absorbing blows from both sides. Women take part as well as men. In fact, the women are better at it, Desai says, since the rioters are less likely to hit them. . . .

Gandhi once said, "we are constantly being astonished at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence. But I maintain that far more undreamt-of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of nonviolence."

Shanti Sena may be one of them.

The July-August *Community Service Newsletter* (P.O. Box 243, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387) reprints from the *New York Times* an article on the growing dimensions of self-help activity around the country. Some fifteen million people are said to be involved in groups such as Recovery Inc. (for former mental patients), Parents Anonymous (for parents of abused children), the Sisterhood of Black Single Mothers, and many others. Reasons given for the spread of this activity are:

1. People feel unable to control "big government" and distant bureaucracies and so are drawn to mutual-aid groups that enable them to deal directly with some immediate problems of everyday life. . . .
2. Mutual-aid groups are particularly relevant for the major health problems of our society. They provide services inexpensively but, and most importantly, they address the large numbers of chronic disorders—among them, arthritis, diabetes, emphysema, hypertension—which require only small amounts of professional medical intervention and large doses of caring. . . . The Florida Mental Health Institute, for example, has demonstrated conclusively that development of mutual-aid groups has markedly reduced the rate of rehospitalization of chronic mental patients. Less formal reports from all across the nation confirm this view.
3. Professional care-givers are revitalized and supported by self-helpers. Many professionals share the great current disaffection with our service institutions. They, too, feel defeated and "burned out" by the rigidity of the bureaucratic forces that beset them. The self-helpers provide enormous new energy and hope. Thus, it is no surprise that professional care-givers increasingly are interested in starting self-help groups, as well as in dealing with the ones that already exist.

Another sort of "self-help" is described in Ernest Morgan's *Manual of Death Education and Simple Burial* (Celo Press, Burnsville, North Carolina 28714, \$2.50), prepared as a guide for persons planning (for themselves and others) a

simple and inexpensive funeral and disposition of the remains after death. The manual gives full information concerning memorial societies around the country, including procedures and economies involved, emphasizing that a "dignified and satisfying funeral" need not be costly. A directory gives the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of these societies, state by state.