

MONTESSORI: PEACE AND EDUCATION

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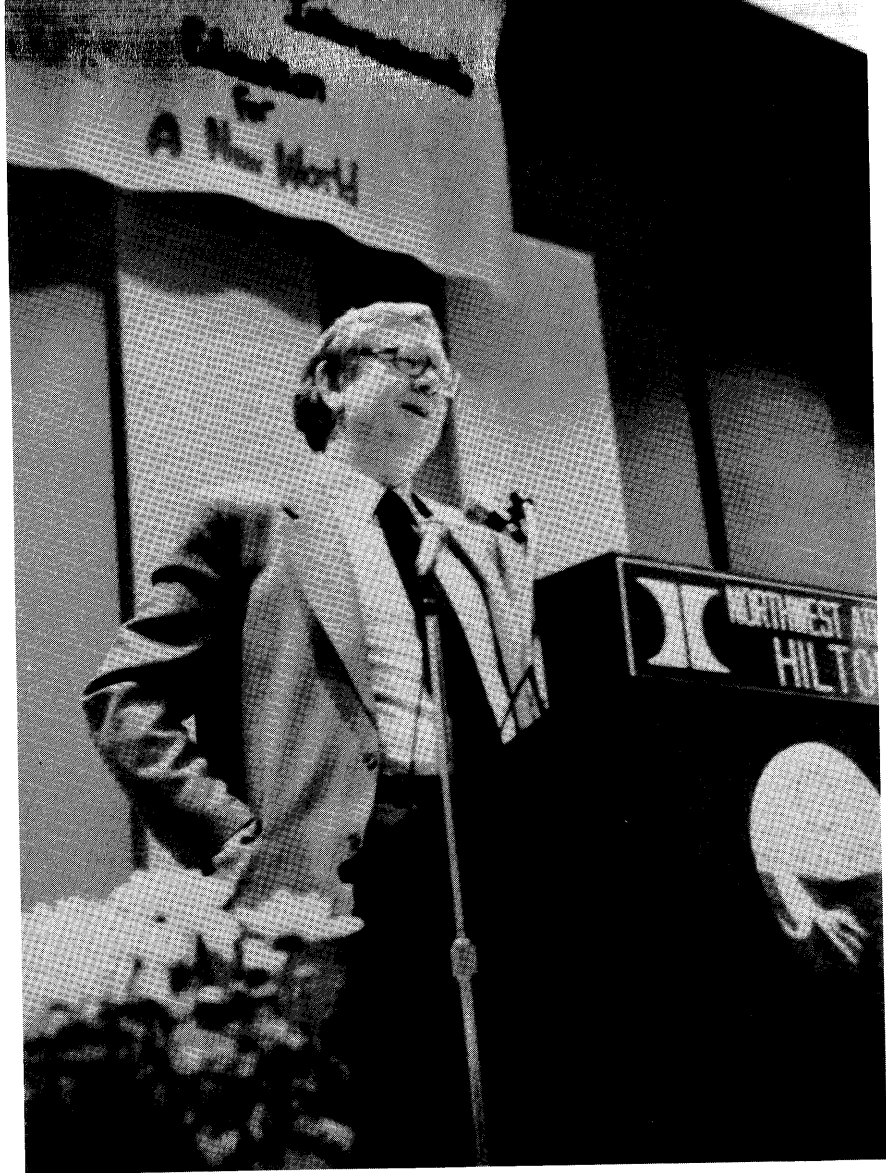
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*"All I do know is that in our international relations we will have to learn whatever the counterpart is of "Follow the Child" and of "Look to the Child." It is possible that we will come to see, eventually, the nation state for what it is — an extensive defense mechanism against learning, and we may find some new pattern of human organization which will simultaneously offer security and the opportunity to learn."*

**John Bremer, Atlanta, 1985**

# Education as Peace

by John Bremer

*Dr. Bremer's article portrays, in superb literary style, the contradictions of the peace movement as it attempts to indoctrinate the child with its own rhetorical "bullets".*

Six months ago I had the privilege and pleasure of visiting Japan at the specific invitation of Professor Rokuro Hidaka, a distinguished sociologist of Kyoto who, throughout his long career, has championed the cause of peace and of oppressed individuals, especially those belonging to minorities. It was the first time I had met Professor Hidaka, but we had worked together, in a way, during the time that I had been Education Editor for The Australian, Australia's only national daily newspaper. He had been invited to give some seminars at two Australian universities and a few days before he was due to leave Japan, with his travel funded by a Japanese government sponsored foundation, the Australian government had refused to issue visas to him and to his wife. The grounds were confused, to say the least, but after persistent inquiries it emerged eventually that the Hidakas were accused in a vague and general way of being terrorists. It seemed strange that a man well-known for his pacifist views — even during World War II when such opinions were not popular in Japan — should be accused of being a terrorist and so I decided to look into the matter. The power of the press is certainly real and all I will report now is that after more than two years of inquiries and the consequent publicity the Australian government was forced to issue a visa for Professor Hidaka and he visited Australia and conducted his seminars — all in a most peaceable manner, and without the throwing of a single bomb.

Mrs. Hidaka is still denied a visa — although the grounds are unclear — and, having met her for the first time last fall, I can only say that she is a most remarkable woman. In the first place, she is a Christian — which makes her a member of a minority group in Shinto and Buddhist Japan — and, of course, she is a woman. Now women are not a minority group — they simply do not have the freedom and initiative that is commensurate with their status as individual human beings, and nor do they collectively have the access to power that is proportionate to their numbers. Especially not in Japan — and I wouldn't hold Australia up as a model either.

Mrs. Hidaka is also a writer and she published about a year ago what is playfully described in her family as a "pornographic" novel. This doubtful title came from a review by somebody who was shocked at the public acknowledgement that women have feelings, that some of these feelings are affectionate and, Buddha forbid, even sexual. The novel tells of the emotional process and development that a married Japanese woman went through and her relations with three men . . . but with a clear emphasis on the soul of a woman, what it endures, what it achieves, and, quite simply, what it is. It is perhaps bad enough to think such things, but to make them public, to write them down, is certainly difficult for the Japanese male establishment to forgive.

And so we have a pacifist who is accused of being a terrorist and a loving woman

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*John Bremer, Ph.D., was Executive Director of AMI-USA and has currently assumed an administrative post with a Montessori school in North Carolina. Dr. Bremer had had a long career in the service of innovative education at the secondary and university levels.*

labelled — and libelled — as a pornographer. That is the method of character assassination, of attacking people — to take what is good and to make it into its opposite, to call it the bad names that arouse the infantile and yet strong emotions of those who have not come to terms with their own hostility and destructiveness, in the one case, and are unable to admit love into their lives, in the other. The most notorious — and most outrageous case — of character assassination in history is of course that of the most famous educator, Socrates, who spent his life pursuing virtue himself and encouraging others, especially the young men of Athens, to do the same, and was finally accused of corrupting the youth.

I would like to dedicate what I have to say to the people I met in Japan, to Professor and Mrs. Hidaka particularly, and to Mr. Eikichi Magara, General Secretary of SOHYO, the General Council of Trade Unions, to Mr. Toru Midorikawa, president of the distinguished publishing house of Iwanami Shoten, and to Professor Emeritus Ichiro Moritaki, formerly of Hiroshima University and leader of the Japanese Peace Delegation to the United Nations and to Mr. Akihiro Takahashi, of the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation. Many others were kindness itself and I remember them in my soul and name them there.

I will refer to one other of my hosts since he has helped me to relate to my theme. I was taken to see Professor Moritaki by Professor Mikio Kanokogi of Hiroshima Shudo University and he was also kind enough to accompany me to the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation. After these visits we were walking through the Peace Gardens which occupy the area devastated by the atomic bomb and we were speaking of the conversations we had had. At a certain point he turned to me and looked straight at me with a frankness that went beyond what I had been led to expect in Japan, and he said, "You have, if I may say, a very direct manner of speaking with people." It was not a criticism, nor was it praise, but a simple description of what he had observed. Now Professor Kanokogi had travelled and studied abroad so that his remark was not made out of a totally Japanese context. I have pondered that remark and have decided two things about it — apart from my gratitude to Professor Kanokogi for his trustfulness in feeling that he could be frank with me — and one of them is that I believe I asked both Professor Moritaki and Mr. Takahashi some very hard questions without being intimidated by their age or authority and without being inhibited by the fact that they had both been injured in the atomic blast of 1945 — one by the blast, the other by radiation. Part of the cause is no doubt my experience in America where the intellect can be — not necessarily is — but can be more free in relation to what might be loosely called political questions, and part of the cause lies in the fact that although I did not suffer an atomic blast, being bombed and injured was not totally unknown in wartime England.

The question, or the line of questioning, that prompted Professor Kanokogi's remark was clear and it had to do with the language in which we had talked about peace. The concern of Professor Moritaki and Mr. Takahashi — and indeed of all members of the Peace Movement I spoke with — is that the younger generations do not seem much concerned with preventing war, with remembering what militarism, Japanese militarism, had caused, with investing energy in the preservation of peace. It is as if they had separated themselves, had cut themselves off from their own history, and dismissed the whole problem as being that of another, previous generation. What does it have to do with us ? they ask.

It was evident that this attitude was the cause of great distress to people like

Professor Moritaki and Mr. Takahashi but they were more than puzzled to know what they could do to change what they saw as the uncaring and irresponsible disposition of the modern generations. How could they be educated, they rhetorically asked, how could they be made “fighters for peace”?

As I listened to what was being said by these earnest and committed men I became conscious of a certain sympathy for the modern generations, although it began as a withdrawal of sympathy from these earnest and committed men. As I saw them and listened to them, I asked myself why anyone would or should follow their leadership. That they were sincere and believed in what they were saying was beyond question but somehow it had a kind of negative quality about it, a strong sense that “we must not let it happen again,” a program of prevention, a warning against error — all of which might well be salutary but is not calculated to appeal to the young.

It is not hard to find a parallel in my own culture for I am reminded of the preachings of the Church of England (and other religious denominations) which were mostly in terms of avoiding sin. The flames of protestant Hell (or, for that matter, the ice-fields of Dante's *Inferno*) were to be avoided at all costs — and we learned, before the real estate agents told us, that location is everything. But it was somehow improper and presumptuous to aim at the highly desirable location of Heaven or Paradise, and instead we were urged to avoid Hades, eschew Hell . . . but this was all negative. It was not so much that we should practice virtue but that we should avoid sin. It was much later in my life, after being corrupted by my deep and abiding affection for a country unique in the world, for America, for the modern counterpart of ancient Athens, that I began heretically to wonder if the solemn sermons of the preachers could ever have contained positive proposals for constructing my own life. And I began to realize that they did not — and, indeed, do not — know how to create a life, not least because in the Christian tradition humanity is burdened with an original sin which can never be overcome. “The offending Adam” is in all of us and, as Shakespeare has one of his characters say, it must be “whipped” out of us. “The natural vigor of the venial sin is the way in which our lives begin” says T.S.Eliot, and if we begin that way, if that is our origin, what can we do that is free of corruption? All our efforts are tainted, and the more we exert our will to achieve what we design for ourselves, the more we manifest our sinfulness in our implicit belief that WE can do it — without the help of the Christian God. WE can do it. There is a choice — guilt or presumption.

I do not offer this account as a serious presentation of Christian theology — although I am by no means convinced that a serious account of the freedom of the will exists — but rather as a kind of residual picture of the folklore with which I and many others grew up. The theology is difficult but what is more influential in the life of society at large is the general picture that is created — that we know (or that somebody tells us) what sin is and that it must be avoided, and that if it is avoided then we will to that extent escape punishment and perhaps be able to commit a good act. But, as I have said, the emphasis is on the avoidance, on the negative.

What makes it much more difficult for us all but especially for the young is that sin is so damned attractive (and I perhaps should say “damvably attractive”) and virtue is not only vague but dull. If you have ever read Dante's “*The Divine Comedy*” you will know what I mean for the picture of Paradise is of a bureaucratic hierarchy of angels and souls going round in endless circles. It is all supposed to represent perfection but I am heretical enough to believe that perfection is more interesting than that . . . and I am serious in suggesting that I may be heretical since, while I accept the perfection of

the geometrical figure, I do not see it is as the appropriate figure for expressing love — especially not human love. The heresy becomes serious because I see more love in the story of Paolo and Francesca — two young lovers who find themselves in Dante's Inferno — than in all the circles of the heavens. For those of you who need to believe that I am wrong, you can take comfort in the fact that I probably do not understand God's love or his justice. Just make sure you do.

I recall a conversation with the Irish writer, Frank O'Connor, in which he was protesting, as only a Catholic and an Irishman can, the punishment of sinners. I was somewhat provocative in those days — you can see how I have changed — and I reminded him that Thomas Aquinas says that the righteous should rejoice at seeing sinners suffering in Hell, for after all it was a manifestation of God's justice and love. He exploded. And it was with great difficulty that he was reminded that his was Aquinas' view, not mine. "The dumb ox," me muttered.

However, our preoccupation with the media, or rather with knowing what happened today as long as it can be condensed into less than ten minutes, requires that we focus on sin, and simply because sin is attractive, it is newsworthy, it is news. We always find that disorder is reportable — but it must be understood that this is purely a social convention. We have all learned that we should pay attention to disorder, that it is in some way worthy of our attention. A headline which shouts that a nuclear power station has dangerous emissions sells newspapers but if you wish to bankrupt the press try "Eighty nuclear power stations provide light to fifty million people without incident." Who cares that things went right?

Peace is, at one simple level, things going right. Who cares?

This brings me to my FIRST general statement. Peace does not have much rhetorical value.

The SECOND general statement follows quite simply. We do not have a rhetoric of peace. By this I mean that we do not have a language of peace. Before illustrating what this means, let it be realized that peace has no rhetorical value in part because it does not have a language of its own, and that part of the reason that it has no language of its own is because such a language, even if it were brought into existence and were carefully nurtured, has very little immediate appeal because it would be a new language, an unfamiliar vocabulary, and it would be about a dull and non-marketable product, peace. (It is rather like introducing people to non-competitive games — "But what's the point?" they ask) . . . it is impossible to persuade using language which the audience either cannot or will not accept, no matter how technically accurate such language might be. This is perhaps Dante's failure, at least as far as I am concerned — his geometrical figures are perfect but I cannot think about Paradise in that kind of language. His failure is in part rhetorical, although that is not to blame him — I may not be an appropriate audience, or if he had written for people like me he might have written differently. But as it is, he fails rhetorically. He does not persuade me.

The problem for the rhetorician, the persuader, the copywriter, is that he must use language which is already known in order to say something new. If he does not use known language, the chances are that he will lose his audience. And yet if she uses old language, how can she say something new? This is why advertising is so general and vague — everything is new and improved in some totally undefined and indefinable way. There is simply the declarative statement that it gets clothes or teeth or minority groups whiter — and somebody can always be found who will say so, if this necessary.

A second strategy open to the copywriter — and this is particularly useful for what might be called “luxuries” — is to sell something on the basis that “we” the audience, the consumer, deserve it. Who could ever deny that we deserve the best — because we work hard, or are successful, or have fine taste, or are rich, or are fashionable, or in the fast lane — this says something about us which may or may not be true but it says nothing about the product. And yet it works.

A third strategy open to the copywriter is to transfer the language which has been regarded as desirable in one walk of life or successful in one sales campaign to another — and language could be taken in its most general sense to include, for example, the actors or their locations as well as the actual words. Ronald Reagan may be the best example of this, but for my purposes this is as far as we need go and it is now time to relate this to the subject of this conference.

It is remarkable — and deeply disturbing — to see that the proponents of peace have, in fact, used a mixture of these elements (which are not meant, incidentally, to be exhaustive) and they have used them unthinkingly perhaps but with the most unfortunate results.

Whether we are speaking of Japan or America or anywhere else in the world, it must be acknowledged that earnestness and preaching are suspect. If we are clear in our views and are seeking to persuade others to adopt them, those others, particularly if they are young, are suspicious. Rightfully or not is immaterial, it is simply a factor to bear in mind. Children of the age of three years can tell the difference between the television commercial and the program . . . but they are still manipulated by the commercial, directly or indirectly. That is scary. They learn early on that people cannot be trusted because it is taken as universally true that they are out to use others. If we wish to “promote” peace — and how about “promote” as a word taken from another walk of life, one in which there are social hierarchies and ranks — if we wish to “promote” or “sell” peace it must be realized that the harder we try, in the well-known and established ways, the less successful we will be. We have taught the young not to trust us.

Furthermore, the peace movement has taken over all too readily the language of its exact opposite. It uses the language of strife, of war. For example, the Japan Teachers Union (NIKKYOSO) “has been determined to continue its struggle, together with democratic-minded people, as the only atom bomb victim people of the world, for peace in Asia and in the world . . .” and it holds up, as principles, in its Code of Ethics for Teachers such statements as “Teachers fight for equal opportunities in education” and “Teachers together with parents fight against the degradation of Society.” And, ironically enough, “Teachers defend peace.” Even the professors wanted “fighters for peace.” And earlier today we heard of “making war on war” and of Montessori teachers being “in the trenches.”

Now it would not be hard to find examples, from the rhetorical literature of many other peoples and of many other groups, which illustrate very clearly that we are still thinking as if peace (like war) must be won, as if peace (like an embattled country) must be defended, as if peace (like war) is a struggle, as if peace is a problem to be “attacked.”

Even Maria Montessori lapsed, on occasions, into the rhetoric of war. “The child,” she writes, “the new child, is predestined to march on to the conquest of the infinite.” And, again, “That is why it is necessary to build and perfect the armament of

education." Now I draw attention to these lapses not for any wish to belittle the remarkable achievement of Maria Montessori but only to remind myself how badly we have all been educated in war, how completely we have swallowed the rhetoric of aggression, of competition and take its vocabulary for granted. And in taking its vocabulary for granted, we take its existence and importance for granted.

In terms of the young — and of ourselves — we need a rhetoric, a way of talking about peace, which is true to what it is talking about. I do not believe that it is conscious but I have a strong suspicion that the young people — of Japan and elsewhere — sense that there is something phoney, something not honest through and through in the talk of their elders about peace. It is a reservation I share. And so I have begun to wonder what a vocabulary of peace would contain, what the words are that belong to peace properly, and I must confess to you that I am by no means satisfied with my answers thus far. This should not, however, be taken as a confession of the impossibility of there being a vocabulary of peace, of a peaceful rhetoric, but only of the primitive condition from which I — and presumably many others — must begin the attempt.

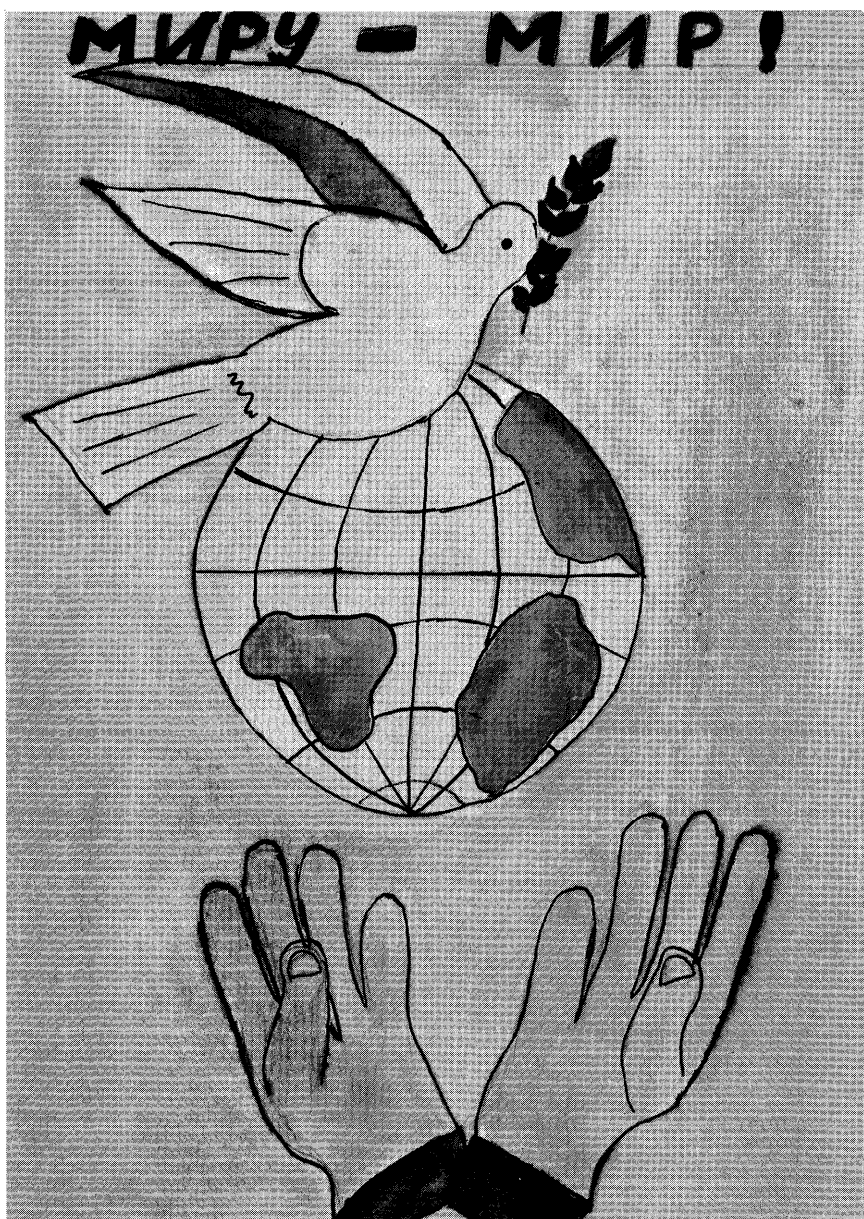
This now leads me to my THIRD general statement. The fundamental problem of peace is that there is no philosophical basis for it which is generally understood, not even among the intellectuals. Especially perhaps among the intellectuals — and to their shame. To put this in another way, there is no philosophy generally available which is built upon the foundation of peace.

I introduce this general statement now because it is so fundamental; it is essential that we rectify the lack of a philosophy based on peace if we are to avoid slipping back into the vocabulary of war, and into the habit of thinking in terms of destructiveness. It is, of course, true as Montessori said in 1932 that "It is quite strange, in fact, that as yet there is no such thing as a science of peace, since the science of war appears to be highly advanced, at least regarding such concrete subjects as armaments and strategy . . ." and further "... we must conclude that humanity's achievement of world peace is linked to complex indirect factors, which are unquestionably worthy of study and capable of becoming the objects of a powerful science."

It is obvious, as Montessori pointed out, that war and its causes can be studied, but it is equally obvious that, as she said, if peace is not merely the negation of war, then the causes of peace can also be studied. But in the creation of peace studies, a number of things must go on side by side and simultaneously — the development of what is MEANT by peace, the development of a language in which to describe and analyze it, the development of the means by which it is achieved and maintained, but, above all, what it IS. In that sense, the goal must be the creation of a philosophy which gives order and meaning to what at the moment is vaguely thought of as "peace."

Although this is a task of magnificent proportions and a purpose worthy of our highest aspirations, it is not a new problem. In fact, there is what appears to us as a confused, muddled and obscured strand in human thought from the very earliest times and so there is hope and help for us if we look at the whole range of human thought, eastern and western. From my little knowledge of eastern thought, it appears quite possible for a discipline of peace to exist already, and I mean a discipline for a way of life and not an academic discipline. It would be appropriate for us to study what some so-called "under-developed countries" have to teach us. Perhaps we could dwindle into being civilized.





Peace Art from Russian Elementary School Children

*Courtesy of City to City Project — Cleveland Heights-Novgorod*

We can now clear away some of the muddle and indicate the direction in which we might journey together in seeking a philosophy based on peace. That what I have to say connects up with what Montessori has said and written is not surprising but I feel I should make it clear that what I have to say is mine and is not to be understood as an exposition of her views. And may I add that an urgent task for those of us concerned with preserving and extending the insights of Maria Montessori is to produce a better edited and a better translated version of some of her writings than now exists. We might then be in a much better position to know what her views were — to articulate them, to re-phrase them, to use them, to question them, to argue them and to evaluate them.

My best introduction is the opening of a famous work by an American philosopher who has not always been regarded as friendly towards Montessori.

“The most notable distinction between living and inanimate things is that the former maintain themselves by renewal. A stone when struck resists. If its resistance is greater than the force of the blow struck, it remains outwardly unchanged. Otherwise, it is shattered into smaller bits. Never does the stone attempt to react in such a way that it may maintain itself against the blow, much less so as to render the blow a contributing factor to its own continued action. While the living thing may easily be crushed by superior force, it none the less tries to turn the energies which act upon it into means of its own further existence. If it cannot do so, it does not just split into smaller pieces (at least in the higher forms of life), but loses its identity as a living thing.

“As long as it endures, it struggles to use surrounding energies in its own behalf. It uses light, air, moisture, and the material of soil. To say that it uses them is to say that it turns them into means of its own conservation. As long as it is growing, the energy it expends in thus turning the environment to account is more than compensated for by the return it gets: it grows. Understanding the word “control” in this sense, it may be said that a living being is one that subjugates and controls for its own continued activity the energies that would otherwise use it up. Life is a self-renewing process through action upon the environment . . .”

These paragraphs, distinguishing the living from the non-living, the animate from the inanimate, what I would call the souled from the non-souled, constitute the opening of John Dewey’s “Democracy and Education” — a work published in 1915. If Montessori was the proponent of the child and of the individual creativity inherent in the child, then Dewey was the proponent of the democratic society and the freedom of interchange needed to have an experience. But the difference in their aims is not so apparent if we take these paragraphs in isolation from Dewey’s justly famous work.

It is interesting to observe how Dewey and Montessori approach human freedom from very different points of view — with Montessori emphasizing the sacred and private nature of the soul, especially the child’s soul, and with Dewey emphasizing the public pattern of relations based on social equality. It would be healthy for us to reverse these perspectives, at some time, and to look at Montessori as a politics rather than as a religion, and to look at Dewey as a religion (albeit a secular one) rather than as politics, but this is a task for another time. Our immediate concern is to adopt from Dewey’s opening paragraphs the recognition that the distinction between living and non-living is based upon the response that is made to impinging forces.

The world is to be seen as a pattern of forces exerting themselves, knowingly or unknowingly, blindly or insightfully, with or without intent. The distinction between

living and non-living is based upon what the receiver of the force — the patient, if you like — does when the force — the agent — is felt. Obviously this structures our thought into what we — as living creatures — do when force is exerted upon us. It does not draw explicit attention to the force that we exert upon others — it emphasizes our role as recipients not as sources of energy, it emphasizes our role as responders not our role as stimuli, it focusses on the initiative of others not on our own. This is not meant as a criticism, only as a warning, since we are more obviously responsible for what we initiate — for the power we exert than for the way we deal with power exerted upon us. And yet one of the ways in which we deal with force or power exerted upon us is to exert power in return.

No doubt we will recall at this point Newton's Third Law, in the "*Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*," that reaction is equal to action and opposite in effect. Now that may be true in a Newtonian world, in a world made up of inanimate bodies, of matter in space, blindly obeying the appropriate laws of force, but in the world of living things, and especially in the world of human beings, there is the possibility of another law of force, of another pattern of energy, of another dynamic.

As Dewey point out, the characteristics of living things is to avoid forces that would destroy — when that is possible — and even to use such forces as a way of continuing life. This means the re-direction or the re-channelling of those forces, which itself takes energy. But if this is done successfully then the energy expended in diverting forces, if survival is not at stake, is less than the energy that is made available for continuing life. To take a simple example — if there is such a thing as a simple example — the force that natural vegetation exerts upon us, when combined with the forces of what we might call the climate, could destroy us. We could be over-run with destructive or unhelpful forms of plant life, they could prevent the growth of what is helpful to us. And so the cultivation of plants, the growth of crops, farming and agronomy constitute for us ways of channelling the natural energies or forces that are available so that they help us to live according to our pattern. Farming is hard work — even the maintenance of a kitchen garden for oneself is not without labor, and yet the physical energy that we derive from the vegetables we grow or from the animals that feed on the vegetables we grow far exceeds the amount of that labor, of that hard work.

Another aspect of this example to notice is that whereas the energy expended by the farmer or agronomist may be concentrated and in a short period of time (far exceeding any possible contemporary return), the beneficial effects may last for years or even for generations so that the energy balance sheet is advantageous to humanity. For example, the energy that goes into the formation of a particularly suitable strain of cereal, disease resistant or climatically adaptable, yields a return over generations far in excess of the original expenditure. What is needed, however, and what is not found easily in natural conditions and not at all among the non-living, is the ability to store energy and to use it in concentrated form — or not to use it all — as circumstances warrant. While Gregor Mendel was growing peas and establishing the basic laws of genetics, he was being supported sufficiently by the social order that he had enough energy to do his scientific work. It was barely enough but it was enough.

To speak somewhat loosely but precisely enough for our purposes, one characteristic of living beings, at least of human beings, is restraint, the ability to wait, to defer — and even, on occasions, to experiment without any guarantee of a return at all, or even to waste. This role as patient is just as characteristic of human beings as the role of agent, we exert force but we also restrain ourselves. We often control external forces

— or try to — but we also, on occasion, control ourselves.

This self control takes different forms, it seems to me, and it is useful to return to Dewey's example of the stone, even though it is non-living. The stone has a structure, a structure of its constituent parts, a molecular and atomic structure. When it is struck — whether by an accidental natural force such as another stone falling on it or by a human purposive force such as a mason's hammer — when it is struck, the question at issue is whether the energy binding the stone's structure together is greater than the energy of the blow. If the blow's energy is greater, then the stone is shattered; if it is not, then the stone retains its shape.

The counterpart of this in human affairs is similar but also somewhat different. When we are struck — and I mean when we have a force exerted upon us — what is threatened is what I shall call the structure of our soul, the measure of integrity that our character possesses. Supposing a family member or a colleague, for example, criticizes us in some way. The criticism is like a blow in that it threatens the structure of our soul. One response is to repulse or rebuff the blow of criticism . . . as children used to say "And so's your old man". In this situation the critical blow does not penetrate the outer shell of the soul, as it were. A second response is to turn the energy, not simply to one side, to avert it, but to turn it back on the critic and to attack him in return. This allows the critic's energy to enter the soul but to be re-used in a counter-attack so that it does not affect the soul's own structure. A third response is to put the critical remark in a kind of holding pattern, or in a parking lot, as it were, while its validity is considered and, if it seems valid, while a way of re-forming the soul is discovered, so that we improve. This last is what might be called the "mature" response . . . but it sure is difficult.

There is another response which is the cause of much human misery — and strictly speaking is not a response at all. Outwardly, it seems like the first response — the remark does not penetrate, apparently, it is simply repulsed and the outer defensive shell is maintained. But, contrary to this appearance, it resembles the second response in that the remark does enter into us and it makes us angry — it disorders our soul, or at least it shows how fragile our soul's order is, how vulnerable we are. But instead of letting this energy return again in the form of anger directed at our critic — which would make it properly a response — we let its energy be spent upon ourselves, our souls or our bodies. If the former is our way, then we become neurotic, if the latter, we have what are called psychosomatic complaints.

Let me reflect for a moment on what I have just said for it shows yet again how automatically we turn to the destructive, to the hostile, to war. The example could just as readily have been an act of love or some words of praise and not words of criticism — but NOT just as readily apparently in my soul. I regret that.

These examples, however, offer us some patterns for looking at human relationships and it would not be inappropriate to ask how they relate to war and peace, and how they relate to what might loosely be called education. Now, we usually think about education as if it were synonymous with schooling and as if it were something that went on between the young student, the child, and the older teacher, the adult. I hope we can overcome those prejudices.

The events that occur in what passes for education, in what is called education, are not dissimilar in pattern from the four responses just described. In the first place, we all too readily assume that the teacher's role is to exert pressure or force on the student, on

the child. The publicly received opinion seems to be that if the teacher does not teach then the student does not learn, or, more bluntly, that the source of energy for education lies outside of the learner, that learning is not a natural process which children — and those adults fortunate enough to remain childlike — do spontaneously and as a manifestation of their own search for self-perfection. It is something to be done to unsuitable, unwilling, unpromising and unlikely material. The blasphemy of this view is extreme and we can proudly point to the achievement of Maria Montessori who never tired of proclaiming that we must look to the child, that, in the school, we must follow the child. Now I do not deny that the philosophical meaning of such a directive is, initially, obscure, but it is good to affirm that if it has problems attached to it the search for and achievement of their solutions will be beneficial, will be productive and creative. If we follow the directive, we will subsequently follow the child in the proper sense.

Now, if we assume, as convention does, that the source of education lies predominantly outside of the learner, then we are committed to a view which holds the learner's soul to be, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, a handicap to be overcome by the energy of the teacher. No wonder so many public school teachers go home at the end of the day exhausted: playing God is beyond us.

We would also be committed to a pattern of education which can best be described as a form of indoctrination, in which the structuring of a soul is not achieved on the basis of recognized truth but on the basis of external power. This explains why the dominant problems of public education are expressed in terms of authority, in terms of control, and why the most apt description of the schools is "Anarchy plus a constable". It also explains why the underlying and overriding fear of teachers, especially of beginning teachers, is student control, is class management.

As long as we see education — as long as society, any society, sees education in this way — then it is caught up in what is essentially warfare. It is little wonder that there is a generation gap, a no-man's-land which we, old or young, enter at our peril. As long as we deny the sacred and inviolable power of the child and of the adult as learners we will find ourselves at war — at war within our own soul, within our own family, within our own profession, within our own society and within our own kind.

To state it quite bluntly, as long as our society is based upon force we can do little to avoid war. We do not expect people — especially children — to do what is right, we expect them to do what they are told, and the most pitiful symptom of our condition is that we easily identify the two and suppose that what we (or they) are told is right and true. Even if it happens, on occasion, to be so, that does not in any way help the learner to understand its truth and rightness — and given the pattern of authority to which children are subject it may be the greatest obstacle to that happening.

In the battlefield of the classroom, in the blackboard jungle, the words of the teacher are like bullets or weapons and they attack the student's soul. If the outer shell of the soul is hard they are repulsed, they bounce off. If it is not hard, then the words enter and act upon the soul in the same way that hollow-nosed bullets act upon the body. Another common occurrence is for the teacher's words to be put in the intellectual parking lot, available for a trip round the block on the occasion of the next test. But when the course and its tests are over, they are just abandoned. They are true "for the purposes of this exercise". What an epitaph.

In the light of these thoughts it is easy to see why Montessori wanted to avoid the

term “teacher” and why the term “director” or “directress” was preferred, but in spite of the rightness of her instincts there remains much work to be done. We need to have explicated the way in which OBSERVING the child is helpful to the child’s learning — as I believe it is.

The directress or director is certainly a power in the classroom or in whatever the educational setting happens to be, but the power is not exerted upon the child, upon the learner. And yet, strangely enough, the child is different because of it. If we could understand THAT we would be well on the way to solving some of the fundamental problems of education and of society. Of course, we can act upon it without understanding it, but it is hard to win wider consent and agreement if no explanation or account can be offered. And yet the key to the solution of our problem lies here. We must observe — which is peaceful — and not interfere — which is warlike.

I have tried to deal with this problem in the context of the dialogues of Plato and in relation to the role of Socrates in them and in Plato’s life. It is easier for me to state the problem in those terms.

Socrates is engaged in rhetoric — he persuades, and yet he is not a persuader in the sense of a copy-writer, he is not a salesman of any particular idea or opinion or course of action. He is not, therefore, an indoctrinator, nor does he set out, in my understanding at least, with the intent of making somebody over into somebody else. So he utters persuasive words and yet is not trying to persuade anybody of anything.

And yet, in a certain sense, he is. The only way I can describe it is as follows. Socrates does not begin by seeking a person out — he does not identify an audience and then go in search of it. He does no market research. Rather he is simply around and about — to say he is available is to suggest too strong an intent and wish — he is simply round and about Athens and if anybody thinks he can be of use, or is of interest, or is amusing or entertaining or whatever, then they can find him. He does not proclaim his office hours, as it were, his availability, nor does he hide away somewhere to increase his desirability, he doesn’t play hard to get. And yet those wishing to speak with him or listen to him speak with others have to assume some measure of responsibility by seeking him out — although, I repeat, he is not hard to find.

Nor does he advertise an expertise, a subject-matter in which he is an expert, in which he deals. He is not a trader. He accepts money from nobody and he claims no wisdom about anything, although he is interested in speaking with anybody who does claim wisdom or expertise. So if people find him and listen to him or converse with him, they must do so for a reason which is peculiarly their own, and they cannot claim that he offers to make them well, as a doctor might, or how to win battles, as a soldier might, or how to get rich.

If the young men come to him it is on his basis — namely, that they must accept the responsibility for being with him and for whatever they learn in his presence — and I put it that way because they cannot claim that they learned from him for Socrates teaches nothing.

Here is a man who is the ultimate persuader, and yet who persuades a self-chosen audience of nothing in particular, although his audience is moved. By what are they moved? The genius and the fascination of Socrates has to do with the fact that although he does nothing directly to us, as a result of our association with him, we do things to ourselves — we face the possibility of becoming better human beings. And sometimes we try to make that possibility actual.

If we understood fully how Socrates is able to do that — without, of course, his doing it at all — then we would really know how to train teachers, true teachers not indoctrinators, Montessori directors and directresses and not apologists for the existing power structure, freedom lovers and not genteel dictators, reverent observers and not condescending tyrants.

From my reading, I believe that Maria Montessori understood this for she knew that education, properly understood, is a disturbance of the universe as it is conventionally conceived and experienced. It places the power structure at risk since there is the strong possibility that it will be exposed for what it is — an imposition upon the sacred order of things, a distortion of what is natural, for the supposed benefit of those not willing or not able to learn. She also understood more clearly than any of her contemporaries that if the perversion of the natural order of things is to be maintained by the power establishment, then the soul must also be perverted because it is the one power, the one course of energy in the universe that is able to see and to show the corruption and perversion of the whole and to correct it. This perversion of the soul arrogated to itself, for obvious rhetorical advantage, the name of education. In reality, it is what was characterized earlier as a form of indoctrination, and it rests upon an imbalance, in inequality of power.

The key to Montessori is contained in the two sayings which are more often repeated than argued about and understood — “Follow the child” and “Look to the child”. The sacred and inherent nature of the child, and, therefore, of the human being, is contained in them, and so is the educative role of the adult. It is distressing, perhaps, for us to realize how limited and fragile our understanding of “follow” and “look” turns out to be . . . but if we realized that we could then begin to rectify our wrongheadedness.

To summarize this view in a handy form: the problem of education is not to get control of the situation but to help ensure that the learner has and is acquiring control both of himself and of the situation. The fundamental fallacy of conventional apologetics in education is that if the teacher establishes control, the students can learn. The students do not learn, they merely are led to believe that the world is always out of their control, that they themselves are not capable of control . . . that power belongs to others. And then some thoughtless public school officials get superficially worried about jargon-ridden things like “self-image” and “self-esteem”. What happens is that the students with any kind of pride lift in them get angry and they either direct this anger towards the school or become “behavior problems”, or they direct the anger inwards, at themselves, and become apathetic and self-destructive.

This fundamental educational fallacy has, of course, its political counterpart. How could it be otherwise when in conventional opinion “education” is a sub-branch of “politics”? The basic political fallacy is that if people are controlled “by proper authority” then they will improve. I suppose they might improve as sheep but scarcely as human beings, as citizens. There is a distinct irony in Homer when he refers to Agamemnon as “shepherd of the people”.

It is now time to translate these views into the context of peace and war. In so far as human relationships are on what Dewey called “the machine-like plane”, they are not human relationships at all but are simply patterns of power in which we use and are used. People are to be controlled and used according to purposes which they have no part in making, no opportunity to scrutinize, no formal procedure for evaluating, no