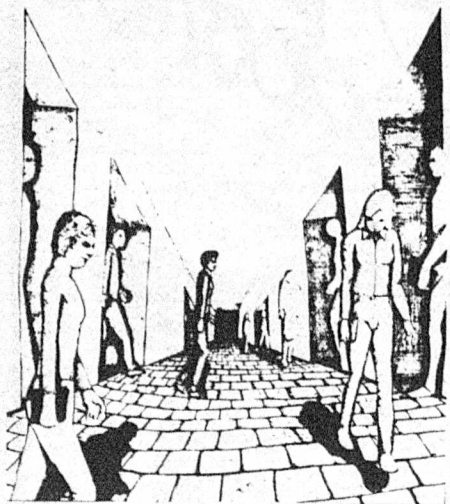


The new narcissism... feature continued from page nine



plex stages of relation: past the limits of ego and into a human community in which the self becomes other than it was. Seen in this way, human fulfillment hinges on much more than our usual notions of private pleasure or self-actualization, for both of those in their richest forms are impossible without communion and community, an acknowledgement of liability, and a significant role in both the polis and the moral world. To be deprived of those is to be deprived of a part of the self, and to turn away from them is to betray not only the world but also the self, for it is only in the realms in which others exist that one can come to understand the ways in which the nature of each individual existence is in many ways a collective act, the result of countless other lives.

The traditional image for what I am talking about has always been the harvest: the cooperative act in which comrades in a common field gather from it what they need. One finds the image repeated in the work of Camus, Giono, Kropotkin, Lawrence, Lilone, and many others, but the most vivid example I know is the scene in *Anna Karenina* in which Levin labors in a field with the peasants, losing all sense of himself in

the shared rhythms of the work, the deep blowing grain, and the heat of the sun on his body. It is an image of ecstatic relation which is as much an expression of Eros as is the emblem of two lovers tangled in embrace, and it can stand for almost every aspect of our lives. Every privilege, every object, every "good" comes to us as the result of a human harvest, the shared labor of others: the language we use and the beliefs we hold and the ways we experience ourselves. Each of these involves a world of others into which we are entered every moment of our lives. Idly, for instance, we take coffee and sugar in the mornings, and even that simple act immerses us immediately in the larger world. Both the sugar and coffee have come from specific places, have been harvested by specific persons, most probably in a country where the land belongs by right to others than those who hold it, where the wages paid those who work it are exploitive and low. No doubt, too, the political system underlying the distribution of land is maintained in large part by the policies enacted and the armies acting in our name - and the reason we enjoy the coffee while others harvest it has nothing to do with individual will and everything to do with economics and history.

Shadows of neglect

That, I believe, is what each of us already knows—no matter how much we pretend we do not. Our lives are crowded with the presence of unacknowledged others upon whom our well-being and privilege depend. The shadows of those neglected others—dying in Asia, hungry in Africa, impoverished in our own country—fall upon every one of our private acts, darken the household and marriage bed for each of us. We try to turn away, but even the desperate nature of our turning is a function of their

acknowledged presence, and they are with us even in the vehemence with which we pretend they are not. Something in each of us—even among the enthusiasts of *est*—aches with their presence, aches for the world, for why else would we be in so much pain?

The question of the age, we like to think, is one of survival, and that is true, but not in the way we ordinarily mean it. The survival we ordinarily mean is a narrow and nervous one: simply the continuation, in their present forms, of the isolated lives we lead. But there is little doubt that most of us *will* survive as we are, for we are clearly prepared to accept whatever is necessary to do so: the deaths of millions of others, wars waged in our name, a police state at home. Like the Germans who accepted the Fascists, or the French citizens who collaborated with the Germans, we, too, will be able to carry on "business as usual," just as we do not. Our actual crisis of survival lies elsewhere, in the moral realm we so carefully ignore, for it is there that our lives are at stake.

Seen in that light, what might one expect from a therapy a grown man or woman might take seriously? First, a simple willingness to accept the existence of an objective reality equal in significance to the self, a reality which literally (as my friend John Seeley likes to put) *objects* as we try to act upon it. Second, a recognition that much of our present pain is the world's pain, the result of living in a catastrophic age in which we do violence to the best parts of our nature. Third, a consciousness of the natural force within us which demands a moral, political, and historical life in the larger world. Fourth, a humility in the presence of that larger world, a respect for the human meaning gathered there by others struggling both in the present and in the past. Finally, a recognition that the future depends directly upon the ways we act individually and in community; that it will never be more just, humane, generous, or sustaining than

we ourselves are willing to be; and that the therapist and client, in the solitude of their encounter create together - in how much of the world they admit to their discourse - a part of the social realm others will later inhabit.

Physicists sometimes use a lovely word, *elsewhere* to describe the realm of being which we can postulate in thought but can never enter or demonstrate to exist. It is as if they existed side by side with the known world but were beyond all human habitation or touch. In a sense *elsewhere* also exists in the moral realm for whatever we fail to love or inhabit fully fades into it, is like a ghostly presence around us, a reality we vaguely remember or intuit but which is no longer ours. Thus, in a very real way the nature of the shared human world does depend on our actions and words, and we can destroy it not only with bombs but through our failure to inhabit it fully and as humanly as we should. That in part, is what Freud had in mind decades ago, when at the very end of *Civilization and Its Discontents* he called for a resurgence of the "eternal" in its timeless battle with Death. *N. J. W.*, half a century later, *Eros is not yet among us. Whether it ever will be is still an open question. But if the answer to the question is to be found anywhere, it will not be in our popular therapies or creations like est or Castaneda's myths. There where self is all, Eros can have no life*



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