

THE BURDEN OF VIOLENCE

By Kenneth Keniston

The young radicals I interviewed were born near the end of the World War II, and their earliest memories date from the years just after it. These young radicals are the first products of the post-war world, the first post-modern generation.

The issue of change is pervasive in the development of these young men and women. Despite their underlying ties to their personal and familial pasts, their development has involved major alterations, reversals and re-assimilations of that past. As young adults, they remain acutely aware of how far they have come, of the differences between their generation and their parents'. More than that, they have in their own lives witnessed and experienced social and historical changes on an unprecedented scale, lived through the Cold War, the McCarthy era, the Eisenhower period, the short administration of Kennedy and the long one of Johnson. By becoming involved with the New Left, they have linked themselves to a moving, changing movement of dissenting youth. And as individuals, they are open to the future, eager to change, "in motion".

Similarly, the fact of affluence is crucial to their lives. Not one of these young men and women comes from a background of deprivation, poverty, discrimination, or want. From their earliest years they have simply taken for granted that there would be enough — not only enough to survive, but enough for a vacation every year, a television set, a family car and a good education. They grew up in a world where they and virtually every one they knew took prosperity and the luxuries it provides most Americans totally for granted. Until they reached adolescence and social consciousness, a few of them were immediately aware of the facts of poverty, discrimination, and hunger. Their affluence provided them not only with economic security, but with

the preconditions for the independence they exhibit in later life: families generally free from acute anxiety over status, thoughtful and well-educated parents, schools and colleges that — whatever their limitations — exposed them to many of the riches of world tradition, and the extraordinary privilege of a lengthy adolescence and youth in which to grow, to become more complex, to arrive at a more separate selfhood.

The issue of violence, and of the fear and anger it inspired, starts with the earliest memories of many of these young radicals. Recall the young man whose first memory involves his backyard parade at the end of World War II, and whose second memory is of his hysterical terror at the encyclopedia pictures of an atomic-bomb explosion and an army tank. Remember the angry and menacing mob in one early memory, the jealous rage at a younger brother in another, the "gruesome" fights in the playground in still another. Such early memories, of course, mean many things. They point to lifelong importance; they can serve as a "screen" for other less conscious issues—as symbolic alternatives to what is not remembered—and they indicate something about the fears of the dreamer both when he was small and as an adult. Taken with the rest of what we now know about these young radicals, these memories indicate a special sensitivity to the issue of violence — inner and outer — that continues as a central theme in their lives.

The major transformations of the past decades also contribute to a widespread sensitivity of today's youth to the *discrepancy between principle and practice*, and may help explain why the charges of insincerity, manipulation, and dishonesty are to day so often leveled by the young against the old. During a time when values change with each generation, the values most deeply embedded in parents and expressed in their behavior in times of crisis are often very different from the more "modern" principles, ideals, and values that parents profess and attempt to practice in bringing up their children. Filial perception of this discrepancy between parental practice and principle may help explain the very wide spread sensitivity amongst contemporary youth to the "hypocrisy" of the previous generation.

In a time of rapid social change, then a *credibility gap* is likely to open between the generations. Children are likely to perceive a discrepancy between what the parents avow as their values and the actual assumptions from which parental behavior springs in times of crisis. In the young radicals interviewed, the focal issue of adolescent rebellion against parents seems to have been just this discrepancy: the children argued that their parents' endorsement of independence and self-determination for their children was "hypocritical" because it did not correspond with the parents' actual behavior when their children seized the independence offered them.

Of course, in no society do parents (or anyone else) ever fully live up to their own professed ideals. In every society, there is a gap between creedal values and actual practices, and everywhere the recognition of this gap constitutes a powerful motor for social change. But in most societies, especially when social change is slow and social institutions are powerful and unchanged, there occurs what can be called the *institutionalization of hypocrisy*. Children and adolescents routinely learn when it is "reasonable" to expect that the values parents profess will be implemented in their behavior, and when it is not.

In a time of rapid social change and value change, however, the institutionalization of hypocrisy tends to break down. "New" values have been in existence for so brief a period that the exemptions to them have not yet been defined, the situations to be excluded have not yet been defined, the situations to be excluded have not yet been determined. The universal gap between principle and practice appears without disguise. Thus, the mere fact of a discrepancy between creedal values and practice is not at all unusual. It seems likely, then, that today's youth may simply be able to perceive the universal gulf between principle and practice more clearly than previous generations have done.

This points to one of the central characteristics of today's youth in general and young radicals in particular: they insist on taking seriously a great variety of political, personal and social principles that "no one in his right mind" ever before thought of attempting to extend to such situations as dealings with strangers, relations between the races, or international politics. For

example, peaceable openness has long been a creedal virtue in our society, but it has rarely been extended to foreigners, particularly those with dark skins. Similarly, equality has long been preached, but the "American dilemma" has been resolved by a series of institutionalized hypocrisies that exempted Negroes from the application of this principle. Love has always been a formal value in Christian societies, but really to love one's enemies — to be generous to policemen, customers, criminals, servants or foreigners — has been considered folly.

The fact of social change, then, is not only distantly perceived by those who are growing up, but immediately interwoven with the texture of their daily lives as they develop. Many of the seemingly "special" characteristics of this small group of young radicals are connected not only to the vicissitudes of their individual histories, but to the history of their generation and of the modern world. The tenacity with which these young men and women adhere to a small number of the core values from their early family lives, their shortrange plans, their absence of political program and visions of the future, and their enormous emphasis on openness, change, and process is both a reflection of, and a response to, a world changing at a dizzying rate in a way no one can foresee.

And these speculations on the credibility gap and the "de-institutionalization of hypocrisy" in a time of rapid change may help explain two further facts about young radicals: first, they frequently come from highly principled families with whose core principles they continue to agree, but they often see their parents as somehow ineffectual in the practice of these principles; second, they have the outrageous temerity to insist that individuals and societies live by the values they preach. And these speculations may also explain the frequent feeling of many who have worked intensively with today's dissenting youth that, apart from the "impracticality" of some of their views, these sometimes seem to be the only clear-eyed and sane people in a society and a world where most are systematically blind to the traditional gap between personal principle and practice, national creed and policy.

In nonaffluent societies, radicals and revolutionaries — who almost invariably come from relatively privileged backgrounds — tend to react with guilt to the “discovery” of poverty, tyranny and misery. Furthermore, many radical and revolutionary groups have in the past sought social and political changes that would improve their own position, giving them freedom, power or benefits they did not possess.

In a society like our own — where affluence, economic opportunity and considerable political freedom are the rule — radicalism is less likely to be built upon personal feelings of deprivation or a desire to improve one’s own position. Nor is the guilt of the wealthy when confronted with the poor as likely a motivation for the radical’s commitments. While radical leaders of all eras have typically been men of high principle, the role of principle increases further in an affluent era. The radical’s basic goal is not to achieve new freedoms, opportunities or benefits for himself, but rather to extend to all the freedoms, opportunities and benefits he himself has always experienced. In an affluent world, the radical feels indignation rather than guilt, outrage rather than oppression.

The issue of violence is central not only for young radicals, but for the modern world. Hanging over the lives of all men and women during the past decade has been the bomb, and the terrifying possibilities of *technological death* it summarizes and symbolizes. These include not only holocaustal destruction by thermonuclear blast and radiation, but the equally gruesome possibilities of the deliberate spread of virulent man-perfected disease or the use of lethal chemicals to destroy the functioning of the human body.

The technology of death has hung like a sword over the lives of this post-modern generation. Recall, once again, how in the early memories of these young radicals, the violence of the outside world found echo and counterpart in the violence of inner feelings: on the one hand, the atomic bomb, the menacing mob, the gruesome playground fights; on the other hand, rage, fear and anger. The word “violence” itself suggests both of these possibilities: the *psychological* violence of sadism, exploitation and aggression, and the *historical* violence of war, cataclysm,

and holocaust. In the lives of these young radicals, as in much of their generation, the threats of inner and outer violence are fused, each exciting the other. To summarize a complex thesis in a few words, *the issue of violence is to this generation what the issue of sex was to the Victorian world.*

In the Victorian era, what was most deeply repressed, rejected, feared, controlled, projected into others, or compulsively acted out was related to the issue of sex. The personal and social symptomatology of that era – the hysterical ladies who consulted Freud, the repressive moralism of middle-class life, and the sordid underlife of the "other Victorians" – can only be understood in the context of the preoccupation of the Victorian era with human sexuality. The post-war generation, in contrast, is freer, more open, less guilt and anxiety-ridden about sex. Sex obviously remains important, as befits one of the primary human drives. But increasing numbers of post-modern youth, like these young radicals, have been able to overcome even the asceticism and puritanism of their own adolescence and to move toward a sexuality that is less obsessional, less dissociated, less driven, more integrated with other human experiences and relationships. Inner and outer violence is replacing sex as a prime object of fear, terror, projection, displacement, repression, suppression, acting out, and efforts at control.

DAFTAR KATA-KATA SUKAR

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|----------------|--|
| 1. Violence | = 1. Kekerasan, 2. kehebatan. |
| 2. Pervasive | = dapat menembus/merembes/meresap. |
| 3. Reversals | = pembalikan, pemutaran. |
| 4. Deprivation | = 1. pencabutan, 2. kehilangan, 3. kerugian. |
| 5. Virtually | = sebenarnya. |
| 6. Credibility | kepercayaan, keadaan dapat dipercaya. |

7. Discrepancy = ketidak sésuaian, ketidak cocokan.
8. Endorcement of Independence = pengesahan, kemerdekaan/kebebasan.
9. Hypocritical = bersifat munafik, bermuka dua.
10. Independence = kemerdekaan, kebebasan.
11. Institutionalization = menjadikan adat, melembagakan.
12. Reasonable = 1. Layak, 2. pantas, 3. masuk akal.
13. Creedal = pernyataan kepercayaan/keyakinan, syahadat, iman.
14. Peaceable = suka damai.
15. Equality = persamaan (hak).
16. Exempted = dibebaskan.
17. Fally = kebodohan, ketololan, kegoblokan.
18. Texture = 1. Susunan, 2. Jaringan.
19. Equally = sama-sama.
20. Gruesome = yang mengerikan.
21. Cataclysm = bencana alam.
22. Asceticism = pertapaan, tapa brata.
23. Puritanism = berpegang teguh pada norma 2 moral serta agama.
24. Repression = 1. penindasan, 2. penahanan, 3. penekanan.
25. Suppression = penindasan, penindihan. (Penindasan kemerdekaan).



Tradition is a guide and not a jailer.

(W. Somerset Maugham).

RUANG KEPUSTAKAAN

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Matter that becomes clear ceases to concern us. *(Nietzsche)*

The strongest principle of growth lies in human choice.
(George Eliot)