

A QUESTION OF GOALS

THERE is no lack, today, of instruction in what ought to be done. The reader is overwhelmed with warnings, timetables, and manuals for action. Books are filled with carefully compiled analyses of the accountability of modern man. No one now, we learn, is without *global* responsibility. Many of the ills, moreover, are massive, calling for large-scale corporate action to bring the needed correction.

There seems no way to deny these claims. The ugly facts are real, and the pain they produce, if not already present, is on the way. And even if not all the dire predictions of the modern Jeremiahs come true, we are sufficiently shaken by current events to take many of the warnings seriously, while wondering if the human species is really able to get together and to change the direction in which the world is moving. We know that a lot of people are forming groups and endeavoring to do what they can. Often the warnings and appeals for action come from these groups. And since the idea is to influence as many people as possible, simplicity is sought, and drama attempted. The unquestionably *worthy* causes sometimes seem without number, and there are more every week. None of these issues, so far as we can see, should be neglected. Yet there being a limit to what a man or his family can do, most of them are. Just coping with the problems of one's personal life is a fulltime job for most of us.

What, in general, is happening? One could say that we are being called to account by our times. We are asked to witness the effects of our collective behavior, and to do something about them. We are asked to put away the habitual response that if everybody is responsible, then *nobody* is responsible, and to accept the burdens of citizenship in the world. What we have done is all being connected up with what it produces, and we are all being asked to accept accountability for

the common pain. We used to be called a nation of lawyers, but soon we may be known as a nation of exhorters.

But what if exhortation does not work? What if the threat of pain is not sufficient to penetrate to the place in human beings where the decision for radical change is made? We know that adjustment to pain already felt is fairly common, through an adaptive numbness, and the use or soporifics of various sorts. The manufacture, promotion, and sale of soporifics is already a large and profitable business in the United States.

These questions really have to do with the nature of man. It is difficult, for example, to think of any past civilization that was able to pull itself out of a slough of decline simply by employing the talents of skillful exhorters. Nothing upward and onward ever got going in the affairs of men merely from the stimulus of warnings or threats.

It may be argued that the present impasse is not like anything that has happened before in history, and this may be in some sense the case, yet what reason have we to think that a crisis of unique dimensions can somehow alter the basis of constructive human action? That a *very* great emergency will make fear a more positively productive motive than vision?

Quite conceivably, we have now to learn to *think* in a different way. Especially if the dimensions of the present emergency make it seem without analogues in history. Suppose, for example, that we felt no pain to provoke us to action? Would that mean that everything is "all right"? Would we be no longer accountable?

To be accountable only because there is immediate pain, or pain visibly on the way, has a splendid simplicity. In a critical mood one might say that it has the simplicity of merely animal

consciousness. Out of sight, out of mind. Nothing in the mind that is not first in the senses. That's what we have always believed and the basis on which we act. We are practical people who get results. Aristotle, not Plato, is our guide. That Aristotle might have been a nobody without Plato is seldom considered.

There is much talk of "goals," today, and since goals are to be reached in the future, both the glow of goals and the threat of present trends figure largely in the anticipations of the "futurists." But what distinction, if any, should be made between human goals and national goals? National goals are examined in detail and generally regarded as achieved through power, judiciously applied, but human goals are only vaguely mentioned and hardly discussed at all, save by a few amateur philosophers and some humanist psychologists. One must think that human goals are judged unimportant because they are not "historical" and are therefore statistically irrelevant. What we know how to do well has virtually no relation to them. In learned discussions of national goals there are occasional references to "quality of life," but these seem to mean the quality that is dependent upon various conveniences, services, or luxuries.

The August issue of the *Futurist* gives some extracts from the first report of the National Goals Research Staff, a group established within the White House by President Nixon in July of 1969. The *Futurist* article is a review of the report, titled *Toward Balanced Growth: Quantity with Quality*. The following illustrates the concerns of the report:

An appendix to *Toward Balanced Growth* provides a variety of charts showing current trends and suggests possible new trend-setting developments of the 1970's.

"While we cannot know or predict the future, we may be able to approximate its general conditions," the Goals Staff asserts. "Broadly speaking, major new developments do not occur in a single step and simply burst upon society. Rather such developments are usually convergences of many preceding steps

which we can already observe. Therefore, it is possible to conceptualize many likely events of the future and to evaluate their effects upon the quality of life, the fulfillment of present goals, or the stimulation of new goals."

To illustrate possible developments during the 1970's, the Goals Staff lists such developments as three-dimensional television, audio-visual tapes for home TV sets, weather control, ocean farming, and one-shot-per-year contraceptives.

"These are only a few examples of possible developments, many of which have begun or may begin to emerge in the 1970's. Many of these developments may not appear in the 1970's or even later, but the list suggests that, as we view the prospects for our Nation, we must broaden our vision to take into account a variety of developments which will bring many new developments to human experience.

"As illustrated by these selected trends and forecasts, the 1970's promise to be a decade of extraordinary change. Our Nation in 1980 could be one in which cities are more clogged with immovable traffic, air is less breathable streams polluted to the point where expensive processes will be necessary to get usable water, seashores deteriorating more rapidly, and our people suffering needlessly from having not developed the necessary institutional arrangements for achieving the promise of this decade of change.

"On the other hand, America in 1980 can be a Nation which will have begun to restore its environment, to have a more balanced distribution of regional economic development and of population: a Nation which has abolished hunger and many forms of social inequality and deprivation, and a nation which will have begun to develop the new social institutions and instruments necessary to turn the promises of this decade into reality.

"If we are to see the second of these possible futures realized in the America of 1980, we must begin now to define what we wish to have as our national goals, and to develop in both our public and private institutions the specific policies and programs which will move us toward those goals."

Well, this is a statement of national goals, and a sober, rather bland indication of what will have to be done to achieve them.

But if we are humans as well as citizens, it might be good practice to consider, along with each reading about such goals, the means to simply human objectives—to turn, say, from this Staff report to Thoreau's *Walden* for contrast and instruction. Thoreau went to Walden to find out how he could live best. He had been experimenting with "goals" of his own in Concord. For one thing, he had been "self-appointed inspector of snowstorms and rain storms," and had performed these duties faithfully. He surveyed the forest paths and cross-lot routes, "keeping them open, and ravines bridged and passable at all seasons, where the public heel had testified to their validity." He cared for the wild things in the woods and watered shrubs and trees, "the white grape and the yellow violet, which might have withered else in dry seasons."

Noticing that his fellow townsmen did not thereupon elect him to any office, nor appropriate an allowance for him, he decided to find his own way of living:

Finding that my fellow-citizens were not likely to offer me any room in the court house, or any curacy or living anywhere else, but I must shift for myself, I turned my face more exclusively than ever to the woods, where I was better known. I determined to go into business at once, and not wait to acquire the usual capital, using such slender means as I had already got. My purpose in going to Walden Pond was not to live cheaply nor to live dearly there, but to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles; to be hindered from accomplishing which for want of a little common sense, a little enterprise and business talent, appeared not so sad as foolish.

Obviously, Thoreau is no exhorter. He had some things to learn from himself in the woods. Whatever they were, he learned them well, since hardly any other American writer of the past is read and looked to today with so much admiration and longing. Shall we then go do likewise?

The woods, alas, are gone, or very nearly. And who could now build a little house with the "slender means" of \$28? How difficult everything simple and good has become! But then, one could not really do what Thoreau did, since he has

already done it. Thoreau was no copy of anything, and a copy of Thoreau would surely distort his example, and might even be a betrayal of his intentions. What then generates in men Thoreau-like intentions? Well, thinking about such men might help—thinking about them, but not copying them—and then acting on the thought.

If we can without distortion bend Wendell Berry's rather wonderful book, *The Hidden Wound*, to our present inquiry, we would say that he has been looking closely at what has seemed to make a good life very difficult or impossible in the United States. We could call Berry a Thoreauvian, but only in the sense that he is deeply intent on being himself and learning from himself and being accountable to himself. For that is surely what men like Thoreau have in common—an accountability to themselves, an attitude which, steadily maintained, seems quite capable of settling all the other accounts in time. It is this which our exhorters, with their endless list of evils to be scotched, of debts to be paid and futures to be sought, seem either to forget or have never known.

What is the hidden wound that makes us so defenseless against a sea of troubles—that prevents us from recognizing the ills we have caused until at last they threaten *all* of us with pain? From the locus of an ancestral farm in Kentucky, Berry remembers the world into which he was born only thirty-four years ago:

There has begun to be an urban impetus and orientation reaching all the way to the farms, the older farmers thinking of the city as the place for their sons, the sons following suit. . . . The general aim was to go where the money was to be made; the resources of nativeness and of established community were abandoned without a thought.

The main social movement being a migration in the direction of money, society was conceived as a pyramid on which the only desirable or honorable or happy position is the top. People not at the top envied those above them, despised those below them, and apologized for themselves:

Happiness was conceived as success. The pragmatization of feeling was a fairly explicit social goal. If it won't get you ahead, if you can't sell it, forget it, cover it up, speak of it as if it did not exist. Such humanizing emotions as pleasure in small profitless things, joy, wonder, ecstasy were removed as by an operation on the brain. The only people I ever saw dancing publicly in the town where I grew up were black.

Reality was defined by the desire for success. If you were reasonable, followed the rules, obeyed your superiors, asked only practical questions, all would be well. Mysteries either did not exist or would soon be "solved by science." What he could not account for, a man tended either to destroy or ignore. Thus he remained secure. . . .

People had begun to live lives of a purely theoretical reality, day-dreams based on the economics of success. It was as if they had risen off the earth into the purely hypothetical air of their ambition and greed. They were rushing around in the clouds, "getting somewhere," while their native ground, the only meaningful destination, if not the only possible one, lay far below them, abandoned and forgotten, colonized by machines. . . .

Knowledge was conceived as a way to get money. This seems to have involved an unconscious wish to streamline the mind, strip it of all knowledge which would not predictably *function*. . . .

We knew and took for granted: marriage without love; sex without joy; drink without conviviality; birth, celebration, and death without adequate ceremony; faith without doubt or trial; belief without deeds, manners without generosity; "good English" without exact speech, without honesty, without literacy.

Would anyone deny the general accuracy of this accounting? And can anyone suppose that a pleasant and enjoyable 1980 will be possible for people at large without some chastening changes in these only half-conscious habits of mind?

Yet the fact is that no one will pay much attention to these things from cries of emergency or in the presence of anxiety and fear.

Let a single man turn his back on the practical matters of his time, going off into the woods or into some version of "the woods" that suits him, and he *is* called an escapist, a romantic, and a piper

if others follow him. But if a few thousand should do something like that it would soon be identified as a great cultural change or reform. This remedy is no doubt too simple, today, and too easily described and recommended, yet it serves well as a symbol, not so much of the action, but of the *thinking*, that needs to be done. We have had enough of action without thought. It makes things worse.

There is a kind of unwritten philosophy in everything Thoreau said, and in what Wendell Berry says, too. One hesitates to try to deduce this philosophy from their work, since it rests there easily and rises to meaning more naturally from the matrix of the originals. Anyhow, we are all too much given to abstracting the workable truths from what men say.

For reformers, the nineteenth was indeed the "greatest of centuries." One thinks of William Lloyd Garrison, who was able to rock a continent with his denunciations of slavery by printing the *Liberator* on a small press set up in his barn. Who, with little or no money, could reach a comparable audience today? From this point of view, the vast advances of technology have made such wide communication by a single, aroused man practically impossible, since they have pushed the cost of access to large numbers out of reach for all except slick, profit-taking ventures, and at the same time glutted the media with the endless verbiage of mediocrity. Technology has merely cheapened the Word, not made it more widely available. It has isolated us in glittering barrens.

Let us notice, finally, that what Thoreau thought and said at Walden is what made it a sacred place, not that he went there and lived in solitude. Waldens are organic constructions of human intelligence, and they can be put together today. But not without a new kind of thinking. Thoreau's simple stricture still applies:

I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. Better if they had

been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they were called to labor in. Who made them serfs of the soil? Why should they eat their sixty acres, when man is condemned to eat only his peck of dirt? Why should they begin digging their graves as soon as they are born? They have got to live a man's life, pushing all these things before them, and get on as well as they can. How many a poor immortal soul have I met well nigh crushed and smothered under its load, creeping down the road of life, pushing before it a barn seventy-five feet by forty, its Augean stables never cleansed, and one hundred acres of land, tillage, mowing, pasture, and woodlot?

Yet this burdening peonage, which seemed so harsh and profitless to Thoreau, bespeaks a dreamy Arcady compared to what a man must push now, and there are all those new and better "things" that the Goals-for-America people tell us are in the making. Must we resign ourselves to pushing them, too?

REVIEW

THE DECLINE OF LANGUAGE

THE discussion of "literacy" by D. J. R. Bruckner in the Los Angeles *Times* for Nov. 9 generates many long thoughts. One seldom comes across material as good as this in a newspaper. In one place Bruckner says:

In fundamental ways language is becoming a means of isolation, instead of comprehension. The language of statistics, for instance, looks like literate discourse, but it is not. Specialized, sometimes technical, languages have multiplied rapidly in recent years, destroying the comprehensive function of language.

One may think, here, of the practical imperialism of the languages in which the ideas of technology are mainly expressed, English perhaps most of all. Technology is a means of producing goods, and technological language has to do with the making of these goods, or with the use of them, or even, in a way, with the sale of them. In *Bilingualism as a World Problem* (Harvest House, Montreal, 1967), W. F. Mackey points out the changes in common communication which have taken place recently, throughout the world:

Language communications which a generation ago were remote and isolated are today open to the influences of direct and indirect communication with the outside world. And since communication systems tend to standardization, the content is usually transmitted in a majority language, often in a language not spoken in the area. With the phenomenal increase in communications of all kinds—travel, films, recording, graphic reproduction, long-distance broadcasting, and so on—not many spots are left in the world which are completely immune from contact with at least one of the great majority languages.

The fascinations of what flows out of the technological cornucopia are sometimes enough to cause people to become contemptuous toward their own common speech, and to wish to use only the language of "progress" and acquisition. Yet think what must happen to a language that spreads only through its applicability to

merchandise and services: the rich resources of English, for example, that articulate the reflective aspects of life are not transmitted to these people. Their daily personal communications are trivialized and degraded, their own tongue loses its organic roots, and they deprive themselves of the cultural values of their own tradition. The Gandhian leader, Jayaprakash Narayan, pointed out what happens when the continuity of a people's culture is ruptured by conquest and the language of the invader adopted by the educated classes. Speaking of the effects of the educational system designed by Lord Macaulay for India, he said that "our M.A.'s and Ph.D.'s who are educated here or abroad are uprooted people. They are neither here nor there. They do not understand either Indian or Western culture, for they tend to take only superficial things and fail to go deeper into the sources of strength of a culture."

But it is not necessary to have an outside invader for this result to take place. People can produce it themselves. Americans today, Mr. Bruckner says, may not be illiterate, but they are rapidly becoming non-literate:

Publishers not only put out anything marketable; they create the market itself. The volume of production destroys the word. Thus, if there were an efficient method of conveying whatever information is to be found in most volumes of sociology, psychology, current affairs, economics and some of what passes for history, it should be put to use. It might contribute to the salvation of language as a comprehensive and precise instrument of thought. For the great question facing the non-literate society is whether we can preserve the language capable of conveying the common culture of the people.

This question is very serious. The disintegration of the shared imagination, the loss of the means of conveying the historical culture of the society, have profound political and personal effects.

A language which is increasingly used for giving an account of production and consumption will inevitably degenerate into non-literate expression. When this happens, the proud boast of the high rate of literacy in the United States

loses its significance, becoming in some ways worse than actual illiteracy, because of the self-deception involved. This sort of confusion was noted, years ago, by Moholy-Nagy in his book on art and design education, *Vision in Motion*. Speaking of the broad effects exercised by industrialization on education, he wrote:

A wholesale literacy seemed at first to open new and happy vistas for everyone. But, paradoxically, mass distribution of schooling accomplished a negative miracle. The speedy dispensation of education for *immediate use* . . . provided the masses with a quick training but threw overboard its purpose, namely, that "not knowledge but the power to *acquire* knowledge is the goal of education." (Pestalozzi.) Exactly this was circumvented. The masses received a training by verbalization, emphasizing the process of receiving instead of producing. The goal was not to express oneself, to think independently and be alert, but to "apply" education for running machines according to instruction.

In consequence of this sort of education, Moholy-Nagy says, the worker tends to see "everything in clichés." Further:

His sensibility-dulled, he loses the organic desire for self-expression even on a modest level. His natural longing for direct contact with the vital, creative forces of existence becomes transformed into the status of being well informed and well entertained. Typical examples are the radio quiz programs which offer cash to the best memorizer; the comic strips which deal in episodes without any psychological foundation; the round table discussions which always present both sides, with the wittiest and not the wisest drawing the applause; and—above all—the digest mania which tailors fiction and fact till they fit a prescribed number of pages and a predetermined attitude of a group financing the publication. In all these, the public is fed predigested pap by commentators as a substitute for independent thinking.

What good is technical "literacy" when it is developed, scaled, and limited for purposes like these?

In a recent MANAS article Emerson was quoted on the corruption of language. One long sentence seems to contain the gist of everything that we have been able to suggest, thus far:

"When simplicity of character and the sovereignty of ideas is broken up by the prevalence of secondary desires, the desire for riches, of pleasure, of power, and of praise,—and duplicity and falsehood take the place of simplicity and truth, the power over nature as an interpreter of the will, is in a degree lost; new imagery ceases to be created, and old words are perverted to stand for things which are not; a paper currency is employed, when there is no bullion in the vaults." This sums the matter up, but for Emerson to be understood, we need the grainy details of present-day analysis. Moholy-Nagy doesn't attack directly the longing for riches, pleasure, power, or praise, but he shows that certain activities growing out of preoccupation with these "secondary desires" have a disastrous effect on the quality of human life. Today, we prefer the moral conclusion to be stated indirectly. Mr. Bruckner is especially good at this. For example, he writes of the electronic media:

Broadcasting in all its forms has allowed society to shift in a single generation from written to spoken word as the principal means of understanding. To most people books are vestigial. Since there are no new, commonly accepted forms to contain spoken expression, such as the verse forms which defined much primitive language, this shift to the spoken word has further eroded the stability of language itself.

The decay of stable meaning involves the loss of individuality. It is not enough for words to have a recognizable surface meaning; language in all its complex relationships should convey the culture up from its past. People were once called literate not because they could read, but because they all read the same things and what they read became the common background of discourse.

We don't know if book sales have kept pace with the increase in population, but the opening up of the large market for quality paperbacks suggests that good books are not quite "vestigial," yet, even though the general atmosphere of what is called "popular culture" has certainly changed for the worse. Meanwhile, Mr. Bruckner concludes his essay with a comment that is difficult to gainsay:

There is another aspect of the condition of culture in the non-literate world which is mysterious. The greatest creative and inventive energies of this society are spent not in the production of literate forms, but in broadcasts, television shows, films and, among the young, rock festivals. The creativity is enormous, but all these vehicles of expression are trapped in time, an expression of time, and gone with time. Mankind has no previous experience of a central mass culture which is constantly created and constantly disappearing.

This reversion to non-literate expression may be partly a reaction to the feeling that language has been perverted and emptied of meaning, so that it cannot be trusted any more. This makes the restoration of language into a primary task. And since, as Mr. Bruckner says, the media "are controlled by business and government," while book publishers are "commercial types," people interested in the written word and in literate expression may have to find ways of reaching print which avoid both government and conventional commercial enterprise. If this can be done at all, it should in time bring a change for the better. Meanwhile, we give Mr. Bruckner the last word:

As common culture disintegrates and words lose their stability, the world becomes loud; periods of barbarism are always noisy. Governments, and businesses, use words, in advertising and in all kinds of political messages, to manipulate the mind. In a real sense the media become vehicles of confusion.

COMMENTARY

THOREAU—THEN AND NOW

IT is risky to quote Thoreau for present-day counsel and instruction, since someone is sure to point out the vast difference between his time and ours. He may have had good ideas, it will be said, but they can no longer be applied. And this remains a fact, or seems to, even though it might easily be shown that the reason his ideas do not seem applicable is that during the hundred years which separate us from him quite opposite ideas *have* been applied.

The claim that the times are different is meant to dispose of Thoreau, but it does not. His ideas did not become false by being ignored. But even if one likes his ideas, there will still be difficulties. For one thing, Thoreau did not write about social questions. Or if he did, he did not deal with them in ways familiar to us.

In what can be called his "social" writings, Thoreau attacked the habit of submission to government. No man, he said, should allow any government to make him a party to injustice. In *Civil Disobedience* his targets in particular were slavery and the Mexican war. He did not regard governments as a source of great good:

Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. . . . government of itself never furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way. *It* does not keep the country free. *It* does not settle the West. *It* does not educate. The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way.

He goes on to speak of a desirable government as that "in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong—but conscience."

But government is now conceived to be the very right arm of social righteousness, and for many people any other means of preserving the decencies of life seems unimaginable. The complexity of modern society and the enormous economic power available to small numbers of men seem to make this

argument unanswerable. So, for the "socially aware" man of the present, the preservation of government power seems a moral necessity. Hence the impracticability of Thoreau's ideas.

Yet in adopting conceptions of order based on the dispensations of a righteous and benevolent state, other ideas alien to Thoreau creep in. The notions of the "good life" offered by the state would for him have been beneath notice, so also the idea of letting the state propose "goals" for the people.

A lecture often given by Thoreau during the 1850's was later published under the title "Life Without Principle." In it he said:

The rush to California, for instance, and the attitude, not merely of merchants, but of philosophers and prophets, so called, in relation to it, reflect the greatest disgrace on mankind. That so many are ready to live by luck, and so get the means of commanding the labors of others less lucky, without contributing any value to society! And that is called enterprise! I know of no more startling development of the immorality of trade, and all the common modes of getting a living. The philosophy and poetry and religion of such a mankind are not worth the dust of a puff-ball. The hog that gets his living by rooting, stirring up the soil so, would be ashamed of such company. If I could command the wealth of all the worlds by lifting my finger, I would not pay *such* a price for it. Even Mahomet knew that God did not make this world in jest. It makes God to be a moneyed gentleman who scatters a handful of pennies in order to see mankind scramble for them. The world's raffle! A subsistence in the domains of nature a thing to be raffled for! What a comment, what a satire, on our institutions! The conclusion will be, that mankind will hang itself upon a tree. And have all the precepts in all the Bibles taught men only this? and is the last and most admirable invention of the human race only an improved muckrake?

This was Thoreau's view of the "conquest of Nature" program. Asked about "social" issues, he probably would have insisted on such universal reforms as would make him hated by both rich and poor.

Thoreau, read unselectively, is indeed embarrassing to us all. For it must be admitted that the core of meaning and truth in what he says is not one whit reduced by the passage of time, but has rather been made more apparent—a fact which should haunt all our benign designs for administered social justice.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves THE ART REVOLUTION

IN the *Nation* for Oct. 19, Richard Gummere relates a story about "Bill," sophomore at Columbia, a varsity football player and an excellent student. "I'm taking a course in sculpture," Bill told him. Asked why, he said:

"Because it helps me to cope. It gets me away from all those abstractions." Bill gestures impatiently toward a classroom building. In an academic climate polluted with too many words, he now works with things; from lecture halls quarantined against deep feeling he escapes into a studio pervaded with it.

Mr. Gummere, who works in the Columbia Placement office, says that Bill is one of many. Few such students, perhaps, have read Herbert Read, yet they have found out what Read knew and wrote many years ago—that the load of abstractions imposed upon the young in school, starting when they get to be eleven or twelve, makes for stultifying and mutilating experience in the name of education. The academy, which commits these offenses, does not change. The students at last demand relief, and this, Mr. Gummere says, is what is happening today:

The number of such revolutionaries is growing, and they are a greater threat to the academic establishment than are those who seize buildings and rough up administrators. Quietly turning from the traditional subjects to take courses in sculpture, painting, dance, film, drama, music and writing, they are changing our colleges and universities at their core—the curriculum.

Mr. Gummere offers a brief sketch of the history of the great revolutions in education. First came the blossoming of logic in the Middle Ages, which developed the skills of disputation. But the defect of all schools, with the passage of time, is their concentration on form to the neglect of the substances, and the next revolution came with the Renaissance, with its thrilling discovery of the humanistic meanings of the authors of ancient Greece and Rome. But the academics eventually

ruined the classics for students, making too much of the discipline of learning ancient languages, and as early as the end of the eighteenth century the third revolution in education had begun—the revolution brought by scientific discovery and experiment. Yet the spirit of the "Enlightenment" was eventually lost in the subservience to methodology:

Under the influence of science, the entire curriculum has been broken up into narrow specialties. Though young people are eager to learn how to relate the liberal arts to one another, faculties today offer knowledge in chunks—philosophy, anthropology, astronomy, economics. They require students to take each chunk in almost complete isolation from any other chunk. A young man told me of a dream in which he lay on an operating table where his professors, the better to teach him their subjects, were carving him into sections.

Furthermore, science has reached into all other fields and tempted scholars to overindulge in analysis. For example, during the last two or three decades, English faculties have lionized Henry James. The complicated life and work of this fastidious expatriate can be elegantly analyzed—on how many levels do James's symbols operate? Does psychology or melodrama predominate in his novels? Was his rejection of his country really a rejection of his father? Can the stylistic complexity of his later work be attributed to his dictating it? By such unromantic inquiry humanists would emulate chemists.

Also, the objectivity of the scientist has been all too contagious. When imitated by scholars in other fields it degenerates into timidity. Society asks heroic questions: Why do blacks riot? Why does money inflate? Why has alcoholism spread? Academic scholars are expected to suggest answers, but they can't because too much of what they know is, as David Riesman says, "on a plateau of low-level abstraction, neither concrete enough for reality-testing nor conceptual enough for philosophical reorientation."

So the art revolution is on the way, even though it must progress against the academic grain. A sculptor who teaches art history—one of the few academics in this field who is also a practitioner of art—said of his colleagues: "They hate art." Mr. Gummere adds:

They admit it to their departmental curriculum only if it is emasculated. A liberal arts student can study, even major in, musicology or dramatic literature, but he can get little or no academic credit for taking music or drama. He can, indeed, use the new art facilities, containing studios, practice rooms, and theatres if he attends Marietta, Harvard, St. Lawrence, Birmingham Southern, and hundreds of other colleges. He can even study under real artists. But he soon perceives that the general faculty, as well as the art historians, musicologists and professors of dramatic literature, Jim Crow these intruders and refuse to recognize as academically meaningful the creative work they direct. I once heard an eminent musicologist snort with contempt over the growing enrollment of string players at his university's conservatory.

But it is the changes, not the status quo, that Mr. Gummere writes about:

This pride will have its fall as more students, their eyes opened by the campus revolution to the artificiality of traditional studies, rediscover creative art. Some already see it not as an academic option but as a revolutionary act. After Columbia's first "bust," a student changed his program from doctoral work in history to master's work in painting. "I began to resent all those learned, witty men condescending to me." At the same time, an undergraduate majoring in political science rescheduled his senior year to include all the work he could get credit for in sculpture. Another chose to study welding, a technique that has become very popular among college art students. One of his pieces was displayed in a show sponsored by the School of Art. It is a crucifixion—its material, automobile springs.

When denied art as academic work, students get it on their own. They found societies, not only to show but to make films. At some large universities they present three or four dozen plays each year. They publish scores of magazines of poetry and fiction. College newspapers run series by student photographers who try to catch the moods of people and the grace of things around college.

A concluding paragraph says:

Finally, students want art because it helps them find out who they are. One of the main functions of schools and colleges has always been to prevent that discovery. Fortunately, ever since the Babylonians, many of the younger generation have nevertheless

sought it. Today, in reaction against the most massive academic and social system in history, the young are striving more vehemently than ever to identify themselves. No wonder they turn to art.

This is a conclusion to brood over, more than one to adopt with relief and delight. Mr. Gummere thinks that art will prove invulnerable to the corruptions suffered at the hands of academics by the earlier revolutions in education—reviving the classics and establishing the sciences—yet it must be admitted that a great deal of nonsense and pretense goes on today, in the name of art. This is not, of course, what the students are seeking and finding in the practice of art. As Gummere points out, there is immediacy in the creative act. It is an end in itself. Its joys and rewards are here and now; it is its own justification. In this it is like philosophy. Indeed, devotion to art can be thought of as a secular correspondence of the love and pursuit of truth.

Moreover, it is a more inward thing than forms of academic learning and the practice of science. And here, perhaps, is a clue to the hungers of students and their resort to the arts. Basically, they seek a more inward life, of which art is a natural expression. If it is ever legitimate to think of art as a means rather than an end, its end might be the protection of the impulse to work in and out of oneself, free from artificiality and corruption. Art has natural immunity to the forces of institutionalization. It may be one of the languages of the soul.

FRONTIERS

Television as a "Cultural Force"

IN the Phi Beta Kappa *Key Reporter* for the spring of 1970, Nicholas Johnson offered a strong case for paying attention to the effect that television is having on the people of the United States. "It is," he says, "the single most powerful, intellectual, social, cultural, and political force in history." While these don't seem the best words to describe the part played by television in the lives of both children and adults, there can be little doubt that its effects are for the most part bad. He begins his argument with some figures:

More than 95% of the 60 million homes in the United States have television sets. (More than 25% have two or more.) In the average home that set is turned on some 5 hours and 45 minutes. The average male viewer will watch it for roughly nine full years of his life. Dr. S. I. Hayakawa estimates that it snatches children from their parents for 22,000 hours before they are eighteen.

Even if television is more often a welcome electronic baby-sitter than a kidnapper, it is plain that no other influence gets "equal time" in its opportunity to shape the psychological environment of the child. As for the quality of that influence, Mr. Johnson says:

Psychologists now know that children learn more about their world and its value during their first six years than in any other single portion of their life. Parents and educators should know that by the time the average child enters kindergarten, he has spent more hours in front of his television set than he will spend in a college classroom earning a B.A. (According to the Kerner Commission Report on Violence, ghetto children watch even more—up to seven hours a day.) Have you ever asked yourself who are your child's, as well as your contemporaries', "teachers" or what they are teaching? Here is a partial answer: that conflicts are resolved by force violence, or "destroying the enemy," and not by listening, thinking, or understanding; that troubles are dissolved by the "fast, fast fast relief" that comes from pills (vitamins, headache pills, sleeping pills, stomach pills, tranquilizers, pep pills, or "the pill"), and not from dedication, training, or discipline; that personal satisfaction comes from the passivity of

possession and consumption (conspicuous whenever possible) of cars, appliances, and toys, cigarettes, soft drinks, and beer, and not from the activity of commitment.

Mr. Johnson, who used to teach law at the University of California at Berkeley, is now one of the Commissioners of the Federal Communications Commission and therefore has access to about all the "facts" that are available concerning television and how it affects people. (He is, incidentally, a son of Wendell Johnson, the distinguished semanticist.) After the foregoing account of the rather dreadful "thinking patterns" that watching television is likely to induce in people, he turns to the powers at the disposal of his agency, which sound very extensive. The FCC could, he says, "almost overnight, entirely reform the radio and television industry." Considering this agency's powers, this seems technically possible. Why, then, doesn't the FCC *do* just that?

Well, it seems that the agency operates under the law and that the law can be applied either rigorously or very permissively, depending on public opinion. Mr. Johnson plainly thinks that the FCC is *too* permissive, giving instances of very lax decisions. Why are such things allowed? He explains:

As with computers, the unpleasant fact of administrative law, such as that practiced by the FCC, is that outputs cannot improve on inputs. And, in most cases, the only inputs to the FCC come from broadcasters, not the public at large. The "output" from the FCC and your television set alike show this. James Landis characterized the problem in his famous report to President Kennedy: "It is the daily machine-gun-like impact . . . that makes for industry orientation on the part of many honest and capable agency members as well as agency staffs." He's right. Every day hundreds of pounds of legal documents are filed with the Commission, all presenting, in the most persuasive manner a talented corporate lawyer can muster, finely reasoned legal arguments why the broadcaster ought to be given what he asks. On the other side, the citizen's side, we receive virtually nothing.

So, Mr. Johnson says—or forlornly implies—please write us some letters. Find out your rights,

what you can make a television station do if you put your mind to it. Now and then parents get together and clean a program up. It *can* be done. But he doesn't have too many examples of this, and if a whole lot of people objected to television programs they wouldn't have to write letters or go to Washington or try legal action. Simple boycott would soon change the quality of the shows.

The fact is that the public is passive in front of a television set, and passive about the time spent by their children in front of it, except for a small minority of parents. Actually, as a lawyer, Mr. Johnson should know from either his education or his experience that, "The government," as Vinoba Bhave said recently, "can act on an idea only when it has been generally accepted, and then it is compelled to act on it." Of course, he has been saying practically this when he asks the people to demand their rights as citizens. But in the case of something offered for sale, you don't need to make a government intervene; you can just stop buying things that are so offensively sold.

We are not challenging either Mr. Johnson's facts or his arguments. Both are useful to hear. But his appeal for reliance on government control seems a peculiarly ineffectual application of the watchdog theory of progress. We must, he suggests, discipline the broadcasters until they exhibit better taste, more moral intelligence, and take responsibility for the consequences of what they do. But what if this is impossible to accomplish through government agency regulation and threat of penalties for gross offenses? We'll just have to try harder, Mr. Johnson seems to be saying.

There is one other thing in his article that ought not to be left out—a demonstration of the effectiveness of communication over television. He relates that last year he wrote a 3,500-word article on censoring television programs, which was published in *TV Guide*, with fifteen million readers. After it appeared he received about

seventy-five letters of comment on what he had said. Then, a few weeks later—

I was interviewed [on the same topic] on CBS's *Face the Nation*—a Sunday morning discussion program with about one-quarter of the audience for prime time evening shows. Despite the fact that the time of the program was erroneously announced around the country so that those viewers who intentionally tuned in discovered the program was already over, I received—within the short period of one week—over 1,000 letters. What happened? The answer, I think, is not that I reached more people during that short half-hour on CBS than in my *TV Guide* article—unquestionably, I did not. Nor did I present my position more cogently: writing almost always produces a more telling argument than extemporaneous remarks. The answer is that I reached them in a more powerful way: through the special and immediate total "experience" that is television.

This only adds to our burdens, unfortunately. It illustrates the penetration and command of a medium which is easily misused, and, as Mr. Johnson shows, *is* misused, more often than not. The cost of "good" television may really be more than we can afford to pay. Quite possibly, this is a problem for which, in the present, there are only private, individual solutions. The continuous attempt to solve what are essentially private problems by public means may lie at the root of many of our multiplying ills. This, at any rate, is one possible deduction from Mr. Johnson's *Key Reporter* article.