VOLUME XXIII, NO. 51
DECEMBER 23, 1970

THE AGE OF PREOCCUPATIONS

THE justifications of the pluralistic conception of truth are many and obvious. In a complicated world like ours, who can deny that we need specialists to take charge of matters which are not understood except by experts? One who argues against the reliance on specialists is almost always driven into a corner by illustrations of the common need of expert help, being obliged to admit that there is likely to be a time when he can't possibly do without assistance from someone who knows more about, say, medicine, or flying an airplane, than he does. A sensible man will give a little, in this argument. He will probably agree, for example, that it might be best for a fine violinist to ask some experienced craftsman to install his plumbing for him. And if, suddenly, an innocent man is in trouble with the law, it is probably a good idea for him to seek the help of someone who knows his way around the courts—unless, of course, the innocent man decides to devote a considerable portion of his life to reforming the courts, and tries his case himself. This, of course, might be a good thing to do. Yet in our world, choosing a reform is a matter of priorities: you can't try to reform everything.

Nor is it especially desirable to make up a long list of the things people should learn to do for themselves, and another of what they can in reason delegate to others. Yet it is quite desirable to give some thought to one definition of democracy—a society in which everyone does his own dirty work, disposes of his own garbage. You couldn't do that in the city, of course. Not unless you installed a compost pit on the roof, and the health department would almost certainly try to stop you. But if, a few years ago, a sizeable number of people had declared the gadget known as the garbage disposal unit to be an ecological immorality, and had campaigned widely for the return of organic wastes to the soil, the enormous project to accomplish just this with the wastes of certain middle-western cities, now getting under way, might be much further along than it is. In any event, a *general effort* on the part of people to do things for themselves—to stop relying, when they can, and see reason to, on the services of experts—would surely open up paths to increased independence. It is even possible that a general tendency could be established, leading people to ask: What *else* can I do for myself?, as an inquiry which comes more naturally than, Who can I find to do this for me?

There would be some limit to that, of course. There is a limit to a man's time and energy. But people would sooner or later find their own balance-points of self-reliance, and this in itself would develop a natural immunity to miscellaneous fears and fanaticisms; it remaining also true, however, that a man can always learn something from individuals who undertake special ordeals of self-reliance in order to show what a human being is capable of—such as surviving alone in the woods with only a bowie knife to start with.

But this sort of survival is hardly a basic or general objective. There aren't enough woods left, for one thing, and the hope of further human development does not really lie in such trials of ingenuity and endurance. What we need is rather the settled habit of thinking in terms of individual responsibility about both the possibilities and consequences of human action. We don't have this habit, now, and the specialists, *as* specialists, can't have it, since they are too busy working in their limited fields.

This is easy to demonstrate. Specialists are always mission-oriented. They are given a particular job to do, and they set out to do it. They *concentrate* on it. The incidental effects of

what they do may not seem at all important to them, as we know, for example, from the enormous increase in air and water pollution in the United States. Well, that, someone may say, is what the government is for—to watch over what all these people do and protect the general welfare. The idea of having the government do this may have seemed like a good idea a hundred years ago, but as the recent Nader study books on government agencies show, it is today quite impossible. Even supermen couldn't make those agencies accomplish what is expected of them. Then there is the further fact that a lot of the time nobody knows what ought to be done. The sort of "experts" we need simply don't exist.

Take for example what is optimistically spoken of as assessment and control of technology. The February (1970) *Scientific American* published a report on the deliberations of a National Academy of Sciences panel on this subject, written by two members of the panel, Harvey Brooks and Raymond Bowers. Mainly, the authors recite the difficulties involved. In one place they say:

> The assessment of technology that is done by government agencies is also profoundly affected by the legal system. The predominant mission of each agency, as set forth in the law, determines the pattern of assessing technology. Weather modification provides an example. The Bureau of Reclamation looks for ways to increase rainfall in the dry Western states. The Department of Agriculture, mainly concerned with reducing crop losses, sponsors research in suppressing storm damage. The Federal Aviation Administration is interested in ways to dissipate fogs that hang over airports. None of these agencies considers the total effects. In the case of regulatory agencies, limitations by law often prevent the agency from considering the complete problem. . . .
>
> The achievement of a better system for assessing technology faces major obstacles. The society is ill-equipped to handle conflicting interests. It does not know how to value in a quantitative way such goals as a clean environment and the preservation of future choices. Analytical tools are primitive, and crucial knowledge is often missing.

Quite obviously, the problems arising from technology are *out of scale* with the available means for solving them. This may sound like a call to abandon "progress," but it could also be recognized as an expression of the need to redefine progress itself. We could say, for example, that it is a mode of growth which *never* places large numbers of human beings at the mercy of specialists whose expertise can have no application at the level where massive problems eventually appear.

Public education is an area where a definition of this sort is manifestly needed. The schools, today, are too large. The children are crowded and over-stimulated. The arguments for bringing large numbers of children together where they can enjoy the advantages of "new" developments in education are false. As John Holt says in his Introduction to Julia Weber Gordon's *My Country School Diary:* "All over the country we have destroyed small schools. . . . In their place we have built giant school-factories, which we run, for the most part, like armies and prisons because they seem too big to be run like anything else." In his article on the effects of crowding (in *Community Comments* for last June), Griscom Morgan speaks of the wave of super-consolidation of the schools which is still going on: "The growing evidence of harm from such massing of human beings has been widely noticed only during the past decade, and the avalanche of evidence of its effect on youth has become devastatingly clear only within the last five years." But education experts, Mr. Morgan says, planned the consolidation policies, and they still drive on to further achievements. The effects of crowding are not something they hear about in their field of concentration, it seems. As in urban planning, so in education. The specialists of tomorrow will be entirely absorbed in dealing with the nearly irreversible errors being made by the experts of today.

As immediate evidence of present problems in the schools, an article in the *Saturday Review* for

Nov. 21, "Pills for Classroom Peace?", by Edward T. Ladd, professor of education at Emory University, should be required reading for all parents and citizens. Dr. Ladd writes on the use of amphetamines and tranquilizers to quiet or control hyperactive children—a practice now subject to hot debate in educational circles and among troubled parents. The article seems impartial. It points out that this practice is common throughout the United States. School officials, the writer says, are unperturbed by the wave of criticism directed at them, holding that "the use of drugs for modifying behavior was strictly a medical matter." Giving the drugs to children does require prescriptions and permission of the parents. Yet the physicians involved, Dr. Ladd believes, rely too heavily on teachers' recommendations concerning children who need help from drugs. He says:

> One distinguished physician who has done a great deal of research in this area has used a check list for identifying children with an "emotional disturbance," which defines "deviancy" as doing anything disapproved by the teacher; it lists as abnormal behavior a child's dismantling his ballpoint pen, propping up his desk with his pencil, or stopping on the way back from the pencil sharpener to talk with someone or to look at things on the teacher's desk. When teachers' evaluations of children's behavior are that questionable . . . diagnoses based on their reports are questionable, too.

There are of course enormous differences among teachers concerning what is "deviant behavior," but Dr. Ladd is probably right in saying that many of the schools are dominated by a conception of "discipline" inherited from Puritan days—"a view that contrary findings of psychology have weakened only in part." From this and other causes—

> More often than not, obviously, a teacher looks for the presumed cause of a conflict between the child and the school, not in a disturbing school setting or an inappropriate demand made on the child, but inside the child himself.

We speak of this, here, not to indict the school system, which is already over-burdened with ills and responsibilities, but to suggest that the entire scheme of relying too heavily on specialists and blaming them when they fail at impossible tasks, is where the fault lies. No doubt the specific argument about the use of drugs must go on, but closer supervision of their recommendation is hardly the answer. The very dimensions of the problem will prohibit much success at this level, even supposing, for the moment, that the doctors really know enough about these drugs to use them with minimum harm. The common-sense reaction of one parent is quoted and approved by Dr. Ladd:

> "I don't want my child to grow up believing that as soon as things aren't going right, they can take a pill to make it better." The risk of disposing children psychologically toward drugs in general is in a sense an educational one. Since no one yet knows how to deal with it, and since at the same time medical people might be a bit overinclined to resort to medication, it would make sense for physicians themselves, parents, and school people who might influence a decision to put an overactive child on drugs, to keep this risk very much in mind.

All this, as Griscom Morgan says, was hardly anticipated five or ten years ago. What will we face five or ten years from now? What other problems may overwhelm the competence and know-how of specialists?

Meanwhile, it seems silly to pillory the conscientious and hard-working doctors, school administrators, and teachers. Too much is asked and has been expected of them. One could say that they should have warned us, but they doubtless thought their expertise would be equal to anything that could happen. We thought so, too. We were preoccupied with other matters and they were the "experts."

The entire field of delegated responsibility needs to be reviewed from the personal, educational, and characterological points of view. In a section on the Hellenic World in *Enter Plato*, a study of Plato's "sociology," Alvin Gouldner discusses the effect on the young of entrusting the care and teaching of them to subordinates who are

not really respected and honored members of the community. In the case of the Hellenic Greeks, the children were often reared by slaves. The child, he shows, soon learned that the slave's teaching was ambiguous. "Do, feel, and be as I say, not as I do, feel, or am," the slave instructor was obliged to tell the child. Gouldner comments:

> In short, the free Greek child can learn his future role neither by spontaneously imitating nor identifying with the slave who helps rear him; for the child's task is not to become a slave but a freeman and master. A child thus reared is punished not because he behaves in a manner at variance with the personal convictions of the superintending agent, except when these chance to be those of the parents. . . . The slave cannot therefore be firmly demanding; he must compromise, trying like a jailor to keep order among the inmates without so agitating them that they get out of hand and engage in outbursts that would reflect discreditably upon his management.
>
> The problem for the child is how to live between the immediacy of the slave-nurse and the ultimacy of the parents, between someone who himself does not believe what he says and someone who, often being absent, cannot himself say what he believes. The child must adjust to parental demands that cannot be known with the certainty born of daily testing; he must adjust to demands that are communicated indirectly and known only uncertainly. The slave is unable to punish the child for failure to conform to his own personal standards and is reluctant to punish the child for failing to conform to parental demands which he himself does not accept.
>
> The slave's response to this situation is to punish the child for visible deviant behavior which may come to parental attention. He will be less disposed to punish the child for deviant behavior that escapes the notice of others, for he is faced with the task of sustaining some measure of cooperation from the child. In short, the slave is more likely to punish the child for public misbehavior than for private expressions of belief that depart from social conventions, all the more so as the slave himself does not accept the convention. In this setting, the child learns that it is not his own private convictions that matter; he learns that his punishments or rewards depend less on what he believes privately than on how he acts publicly. It may be in some part through such early experiences that a child first comes to develop a special sensitivity to the opinions of others and is first socialized to be a member of a shame culture.

The relations of modern children to their schools are vastly more complicated than this, and what parallels exist must be carefully selected. Moreover, many teachers of today are not intimidated by the public opinion of the community. The point, here, relates to the psychological consequences of the attitudes of parents in delegating educational responsibility to others. To the extent that parents do not genuinely respect the persons who teach their young, some of these judgments about education of the Greek children can be seen to apply.

In *The Hidden Wound,* Wendell Berry writes at length of the deprivation suffered by southern whites in delegating to black men what came to be called "nigger work," which meant that the whites cut themselves off from essential forms of experience in relationships with the land. Berry grew up under the care of two black people. He learned so much from them as a human being that he wrote this book to acknowledge his debt and to penetrate as deeply as he could in understanding the ill of racism. The wrong done by the whites to the blacks is well known. Not so well understood is the mutilation of themselves accomplished by the whites in adopting the spurious conception of "nigger work." Mr. Berry explores the subject:

> Given the great urgency to own and keep his farm, coupled with the usually wretched economic predicament of the American farmer, it is easy to see why the white owner's interest in the land has usually tended to be abstract, represented in acreages, dollars, measures, numbers. The mind of the white laborer has similarly tended to abstraction; he worked with the idea that his work would lead to ownership, or at least that, as a white man, the nigger work he was doing was unworthy of him; in neither case, because of his sense of racial superiority, did he find it necessary to come to emotional or philosophical terms with the work he was doing. Only the black man, the nigger to whom nigger work was appointed, for whom there was no escape, was able to face it as a present and continuing necessity, and to invent the means of enduring and living with it—and, if I understand the communal and emotional impetus of

> the work song, of building a culture, not beside or in spite of that necessity, but *upon* it to triumph over it. It seems to me that the black people developed the psychology, the emotional resilience and equilibrium, the *philosophy*, and the art necessary to endure and even enjoy hard manual labor wholly aside from the dynamics of ambition. And from this stemmed an ability more complex than that of the white man to know and bear life. What we should have learned willingly ourselves we *forced* the blacks to learn, and so prevented ourselves from learning it.

And so, by divers means, we come at last to a general recognition of the preoccupations and external goals which stand as barriers to an understanding of what is wrong with our lives. The trouble does not lie in any of the specific symptoms which attract so much attention and claim endless effort at diagnosis and explanation. Men have been sensing this and crying out for "total revolution" with increasing frequency in recent years. By our habits of measuring everything as exactly as we can, and objectifying our judgments in concrete proposals, we are led to demand vast institutional change, and there is reason for the idealizing intelligence to declare that nothing less than this will do, since the mistakes of the past now confronting us are monumental and great.

Yet the fact is that where there are individuals who *do* accept general responsibility, and when they are persons who develop competence and the willingness to work persistently, good things begin to happen almost at once. Institutions are strait jackets mainly because the people working in them fail to use their facilities as tools. Reversing the tendency and direction of an entire civilization is an inch-by-inch, day-to-day affair. It must be begun by individuals who grow independent of the past, and use their strength in all the relationships where self-reliance can be applied. Every man who does this increases the freedom to act for other resourceful men of tomorrow and the future. A great many men and their families, for example, would find it not only impractical but quite impossible to "go back to the soil," as, say, Wendell Berry has done. But no man is without the ability to regain some of the native functions and responsibilities he has lost or relinquished, through the years. A person may still need to go to the doctor, yet he can begin to become an amateur authority on his own health by a little reading and practice of simple rules, and to persuade his doctor to explain and support what he proposes. This will please the *good* doctors very much. Parents who begin to be more resourceful will find their children getting more resourceful. A shared resourcefulness is doubtless a basic principle of the synergistic society.

When such human qualities begin to run together, the axes of a new sort of social formation begin to appear, and special abilities flower in a non-authoritative atmosphere. In such a society, a specialist is no longer a man who is awesome and impossible to understand, but simply one who can do things that everyone understands, but a little better, a little more effectively. He may be admired, but he is never feared. It is to such men that the education of the young may be partly entrusted.

REVIEW
DYNAMICS OF CHANGE

IN the November *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, John Platt, a research biophysicist and associate director of the Mental Health Institute at the University of Michigan, endeavors to place the phenomenon of sudden or revolutionary social change in the framework of scientific understanding. It is a useful effort and deserves attention. Naturally enough, he begins with parallels in physical and biophysical processes, then relates the lessons of these patterns to happenings in human consciousness—the latter being the area where we need increased awareness and help.

Drawing on a variety of sources in scientific literature, he speaks first of the tendency in the new physics to conceive physical reality in terms of field and flow, rather than in the behavior of isolated objects or particles. The units found in nature—such as chemical molecules, cells, organisms—all participate in flows of various sorts, and these flows have themselves a certain constancy of form, as in the case of a waterfall, or in the eddies which whirl in the pool below. The units continually change, but the flow-forms have self-maintaining, hierarchical structure. Yet these, too, change. The "flow-systems," Dr. Platt says, "can undergo sudden transitions to new self-maintaining arrangements which will in turn be stable for a long time." This is apparently a general principle to be observed throughout nature. The writer draws on the theoretical physicist, David Bohm:

> Bohm emphasizes that there is a similar restructuring, by growth, of a complex structure to larger hierarchical patterns with the passage of time, like the growth of large crystals from a mass of small ones under heat and pressure. The growth may not be uniform but by successive small steps as each crystal rearranges suddenly. Likewise in the biological world, a group of children or a group of industrial organizations—brought together may rather suddenly develop leader-follower relationships and a defined pattern of roles throughout the group. In general, the growth picture is that of a hierarchical structure with stable pattern from the lowest levels (molecules, enzyme cycles, cells) up to the level *i* (say, the organism), which grows to a new structure because it comes in touch with new and different materials or information or another organism. This can make the patterns unstable at level *i* until there is a resolution (conflict, cooperation) with restructuring either by breaking apart or by a new organization at the $i + l$ level to make a new stable pattern encompassing the larger experience or the larger system.
>
> Examples of this hierarchical growth by restructuring to a higher level of organization may be found in many fields. Probably the best examples in the field of ideas are those Thomas Kuhn analyzes in "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions," such as the jump within a generation or so from the Ptolemaic System to the Copernican system in astronomy, or the jump in 1895 to 1925 from classical mechanics to quantum mechanics, in the field of physics.

Dr. Platt emphasizes that he is speaking of *self*-restructuring, and suggests that such evolutionary jumps "may actually be much more common than we have supposed, with evolution in general not taking place so much by steady change as by small saltatory steps of this kind which reorganize one subsystem after another." While there are these parallels with biological and even physical phenomena, Dr. Platt has nothing reductionist in mind in calling attention to them. The actual source of the impulse to change remains obscure, and the reorganization of an individual human life through the inspiration of mystical experience or vision is for him a valid instance of the general conception of progressive change he offers for consideration.

Concerning such changes in the social area, he has this to say:

> Finally, the area of social evolution exhibits the most dramatic and large-scale restructurings of this kind that we know about, such as the sudden collective restructurings that occurred in the Reformation and in the Industrial Revolution. These changes go deeper than ordinary political revolutions because they are not simply an exchange of power from one small group to another, but a thoroughgoing change in philosophy, personal attitudes and ways of work and economic organization in every part of

> society. The democratic revolutions, starting with the United States, and the communist revolutions also represent this kind of sudden, profound self-restructuring, with whole populations united in the creation of change at every level. And the largest of all these changes, in its long-range evolutionary implications, is the world transformation through which all human society is now passing.

What *is* this "world transformation" now going on? Definitions are hazardous, yet we can surely say that it is both a cognitive and an intuitive change, with a strong moral immediacy as its base. Perhaps the best recent book suggesting its character is Charles Reich's *The Greening of America*, and with it one might read Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture* and Paul Goodman's *New Reformation.* But with a change of this sort, and especially at the present time, subjective alterations bringing insight and vision seem always to be accompanied by their over-simplifying copies and falsifications. A light which for one man becomes an opportunity to see more clearly, may, for someone who merely borrows it, only raise the level of self-delusion and broaden his susceptibility to suggestion. At the same time, any significant advance in human attitudes inevitably hardens the opposition, which in the beginning always has the majority. An evolutionary jump, therefore, Dr. Platt says, is preceded and accompanied by what he calls "cognitive dissonance." Again he uses Kuhn's study of scientific revolutions:

> Kuhn describes in detail the scientific dissonance that precedes his scientific revolutions. First, there are accumulating bits of data that do not fit the old predictions; or rules of thumb in certain areas that seem to be justified only by odd assumptions. In the beginning, these difficulties are dismissed as trivial or as errors of measurement or crackpot arguments, but they do not go away, and they get more numerous. After a time, the confrontation with the old system comes to be recognized as fundamental, and various proposals for a reconciliation are brought forward. Then suddenly a simplification from some entirely different point of view makes big parts of the problem snap into new and clearer relationships. There is a collective sense of relief and achievement, even though a long period of working-out may be ahead. . . .
>
> Today, the transformation of our economic system or of the nation-state toward more humane structures is likewise heralded by a general realization that pollution, the ghettos, the military-industrial complex or the Vietnam war do not even fit the system's own goals or images of itself. These divergences can only be gotten rid of by forcing them either into a rigid delusional system like the paranoiac's, that redefines them as somehow "intended" and "good"; or else by a restructuring of the whole system toward better integrated higher-order patterns.

There is this concerning the rapidity of such changes:

> Five years before the French Revolution, who would have estimated that it would take only a few months to overthrow the massed power of the aristocracy, the church and the army, with all the weight of tradition and power and immovable bureaucracy on their side? A rational man would have said that any deep change would take fifty years or more: the time to train teachers, say, to re-educate the sons of the nobility, or the time to achieve ecclesiastical reform or a more sympathetic court. Yet when the change came, it came like lightning, though final working-out took many years.

In the concluding section of this article, Dr. Platt reviews the means by which new ways of doing things by-pass established modes, creating temporary structures which accomplish human ends more effectively than familiar channels of communication and action. "It is not at all clear," he says, "whether self-structuring hierarchical jumps of this kind can be to any appreciable degree anticipated or guided," although he adds what seems a major clue: "Either 'anticipation' or 'guidance' would be themselves creative acts which would be part of the self-structuring."

This discussion by Dr. Platt has many suggestive passages and the reader's imagination is likely to leap ahead with various hopes and wonderings. Yet the *speed* of the change, on which great emphasis is laid here, may be more apparent than real. That is, small molecular changes may have been taking place for many

years, as with the long preparation afforded by the Enlightenment before the French Revolution, which exercised a vast educational influence in France, and in America as well, and which came to rapid fruition in the actual overthrow of the old regime. Similar small changes have been going on in the United States and other countries, during the present cycle. As time passes, their decisive effect may be better understood. The labors of Gandhi, for example, which began late in the last century, have had an immeasurably shaping influence on the serious thought of the present, and there may have been others, not so well known, perhaps, yet having both iconoclastic and constructive effect on many minds, during the generations since. Quite possibly, we ought to speak of the present turmoil as representing an age of birth rather than only that of "revolution."

COMMENTARY
"HUMANLY SIGNIFICANT AUTHORITIES"

WHAT seems the key passage in John H. Schaar's article, quoted in this week's Frontiers, is the following:

> Who am I as an individual? Who am I as a member of this society? Who am I as a man, a member of humanity? Each of the three questions contains within itself a host of questions, and the way a man formulates and responds to them composes the center and structure of his values.
>
> Humanly significant authorities are those who help men answer these questions in terms that men implicitly understand.

What sort of persons, then, qualify as "humanly significant authorities"? This is the same as asking what are the authentic hallmarks of wisdom. Perhaps we can say that a man capable of humanly significant authority is one who has had long experience in seeking answers to the three questions, and who knows that there is no finality in what one man can tell another—that the only useful answers lie in what a man tells to himself.

Yet there are clues. Doubtless the "host of questions" which are generated by the primary questions contain many clues. The vast Socratic inquiry presented in the works of Plato is probably filled with them.

We know something of how the mind works in relation to the search for answers. A false, perverted, or oversimplifying solution, when it has for a time gained acceptance, but then is exposed—exposed both in itself and in its ugly consequences—often has the effect of closing off the entire area of meaning which it misrepresented. *That* we don't need to look into, men say. We know about *that.* As a result of this tendency to foreclose on wide regions of inquiry, there are vast oscillations in intellectual and moral history, attended, at the beginning of a major change, with high enthusiasm, but usually ending in deep pessimism and even despair. The despair comes from feeling that what we need most to know is far beyond our competence. Our longings find us babes in the woods.

Today, for example, we have hardly any language at all for disciplined subjective investigation. The half-truth that man is what he does has seemed sufficient self-knowledge for us for so long that authentic psychology, as Maslow and others have pointed out, is really an infant science. The instrumental values of the techniques of scientific discovery have systematically shut out the meanings of the internal world for long generations. Only now are we beginning to rediscover the *being* needs and values which, for ancient philosophers, were their main concern.

It is clear from what Mr. Schaar says that the only "humanly significant authorities" are *teachers* in the high and original meaning of this term. Teachers do not "answer" basic questions; they help men to answer them in ways they can understand. Only after this sort of teaching is more widely adopted can the reordering of society actually begin. From start to finish, it is a voluntary undertaking.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE INFANT SCHOOLS

ONE of the most valuable and encouraging of the contributions to *Radical School Reform* (Simon & Schuster), edited by Ronald and Beatrice Gross, is by Joseph Featherstone, an editor of the *New Republic,* and reprinted from that magazine. The article makes about ten pages of the book and is packed with information about Britain's Infant Schools.

The name of these schools is misleading to American readers, who think of infants as babes in arms. Infant schools, in England, include kindergarten, or children of kindergarten age, and take them up to seven or eight years old. They are, from Mr. Featherstone's report, wonderful places. He visited a number of them, was delighted by them, and learned that such schools are widespread in present-day England:

> What we saw is no statistical sample. The practice of the good schools we visited in different kinds of communities are not universal; but there are reasons for thinking they are no longer strikingly exceptional. The schools we saw are, for the most part, staffed by ordinary teachers; they are not isolated experiments, run by cranks and geniuses. A government advisory body—the Plowden Committee—published a massive, and to American eyes, a radical report early this year, in which it indicated that about a third of England's 23,000 primary schools have been deeply influenced by the new ideas and methods, that another third are stirring under their impact, and that the remaining third are still teaching along the formal lines of British schools in the thirties, and of American schools now.
>
> The change is most widespread and impressive in the infant schools, and becomes more scattered on the junior level. Junior schools in some authorities are playing stunning variations on the free themes developed by the infant schools; but, in general, change in the junior schools is slower, more diffident and faces more problems.

What "changes" is he talking about?

The whole article is needed to generate a proper answer to this question. Mr. Featherstone's first impression was of confusion and disorder, but he came to see that it represented diverse, intense activity. In one school in a working class area, he arrived on his visit early in the morning. A number of children were there before the teachers, "reading, writing, painting, playing music, tending to pets." Teachers sift in slowly, he says, and start to work with individuals. The teachers are very important, but it doesn't show so much as in a conventional school. They go about, giving time to children who need it. One of them said: "I can give all my attention to a child for five minutes, and that's worth more to him than being part of a sea of faces all day." Conventional teachers who fear the informality of these arrangements need only visit one of the infant schools to be converted. This unsystematic system *works.*

> The rooms are fairly noisy—more noisy than many American teachers or principals would allow—because children can talk freely. Sometimes the teacher has to ask for quiet. With as many as forty in some classes, rooms are crowded and accidents happen. Paint spills, a tub overflows, there are recriminations. Usually the children mop up and work resumes.
>
> The visitor is dazed by the amount and variety and fluency of the free writing produced: stories, free-verse poems, with intricate images, precise accounts of experiments in "maths" and finally, looking over a tiny little girl's shoulder, he finds: "Today we had visitors from America."
>
> After a time, you overcome your confusion at the sheer variety of it all, and you begin making more definite observations. The physical layout of the classrooms is markedly different from ours. American teachers are coming to appreciate the importance of a flexible room, but even in good elementary schools this usually means having movable, rather than fixed, desks. In these classes there are no individual desks, and no assigned places. Around the room (which is about the size of one of ours) there are different tables for different kinds of activities: art, water and sand play, number work. (The number tables have all kinds of number lines—strips of paper with numbers marked on them in sequence on which the children learn to count and reason mathematically—beads, buttons and odd things to count; weights and balances; dry and liquid measures; and a rich variety of apparatus for learning

basic mathematical concepts, some of it homemade. . . .)

Mr. Featherstone says that the conventional schools can claim to be doing a slightly better job than these new infant schools, on the basis of tests. The difference is greatest, he says, in mechanical arithmetic and least in reading. He adds, however:

> Formal schools teach children to take conventional tests; that is their function, and it would be surprising if all their efforts didn't produce some results. In view of the lack of test training in the freer schools, the students' results seem to me surprisingly high. It is perfectly clear that the mathematics taught in the informal schools—mathematical relationships in which process of thought counts for more than arithmetical skill—and the English—free writing, rather than grammar and so on—put their students at a disadvantage on achievement tests, whose authors would probably be the first to admit this. England and America badly need new kinds of tests. My own very strong impression is that in areas easy to define and probably not hard to test—ability to write, for example, or understanding of the math they were doing—the children in the good schools I saw, including the slum schools, were far ahead of students in good schools in this country.

To illustrate the learning that goes on in the infant schools, Mr. Featherstone takes reading as an example. It is not made much of in the infant schools. In fact, it is not really evident just how the children do learn to read. It is not a separate subject. Actually, the children learn a great deal from each other. "They hang around library corners long before they can read, handling the books, looking at pictures, trying to find words they do know, listening and watching as the teacher hears other children's reading." Little children imitate older ones, and somehow or other, they all learn to read.

> Increasingly in the good infant schools, there are no text books and no class readers. There are just books, in profusion. Instead of spending their scanty book money on 40 sets of everything, wise schools have purchased different sets of reading series, as well as a great many single books, at all levels of difficulty. Teachers arrange their classroom libraries so they can direct students of different abilities to appropriate books, but in most classes a child can tackle anything he wants. As a check, cautious teachers ask them to go on their own through a graded reading series—which one doesn't matter.
>
> However a child picks up reading, it will involve learning to write at the same time, and some write before they can read; there is an attempt to break down the mental barrier between the spoken, the written and the printed word.

There is much more on this subject, after which Mr. Featherstone says:

> I've focused on reading, although of course children spend their time doing other things, and the teachers in the schools we saw would be annoyed at the manner in which I've singled out one academic subject. The very best often argued that art was the key. Miss Nash, head of Sea Mills School in Bristol said firmly that if the art is good, all else follows. All else does follow, richly, at Sea Mills, where the infants sat us down and performed a concert of skillful poetry and songs they made up on musical instruments.

Finally:

> The external motions teachers go through in the schools matter less than what the teachers are and what they think. An organizational change—the free day, for example, or simply rearranging classroom space—is unlikely to make much difference unless teachers really believe that in a rich environment young children can learn a great deal by themselves and that most often their own choices reflect their needs. But when you see schools where teachers do believe in them, it is easy to share the Plowden Report's enthusiasm for informal, individual learning in the early years of school. (The Plowden Committee is in a sense the official voice of the primary school revolution.). . . With kindergarten and the first few years fused together, children have an extended time in which to learn to read and write and work with numbers. This is especially effective if the pattern of learning is individual; if the teacher is important, but she doesn't stand in the way or try to take over the whole job. Many of the difficulties that plague formal first-grade classes disappear; children aren't kept back from learning, nor are they branded as problems if they take their time.

Mr. Featherstone calls these schools a "historical accident"—but now that they exist, they are appreciated. The teachers won't give them up.

FRONTIERS

Authority and Legitimacy

USING language familiar to all, and without becoming in the least apocalyptic, John H. Schaar, who teaches politics at the University of California at Santa Cruz, has in a single essay provided an extraordinarily useful analysis for understanding the disorders of the modern technological society. He does not draw at length on other writers, but those he refers to include Max Weber, Henry Adams, Hannah Arendt, Ortega y Gasset, and Jacques Ellul. The focus of the discussion is on the modern breakdown of authority. His paper, "Reflections on Authority," appeared in No. 8 of the *New American Review*, published in January of this year. The conclusion he reaches is given in the last paragraph:

> The current epidemic of revolts and uprisings, the current challenging of established institutions and processes, the thickening atmosphere of resentment and hostility, the dropout cultures of the young—these are something other than the romantic, reactionary, or nihilistic spasms which they are seen as in some quarters of the academy and the state. They are the cries of people who feel that the processes and powers which control their lives are inhuman and destructive. They are the desperate questionings of people who fear that their institutions and officials have no answers to the questions that matter. They are overt signs of the underlying crisis of legitimacy in the modern state.

We leave the philosophic question of the origin of authority—and legitimacy—untouched, since it is difficult to answer, and Mr. Schaar's examination of it, while valuable, is too complex for summary. The main point is that an authority is conceived to be legitimate when it is based on principles or ideas not invented by those who wield authority, but have a prior and higher source. Through common recognition and observance of those principles, authority gains trust, respect, and legitimacy.

When, however, such guiding principles are no longer regarded as having existence or being "real," authority seeks its justification in the objectives it pursues, which in our time are defined as the "public good," and this "good" is identified in terms of objective goals commonly conceded to be sought by all men. Mr. Schaar writes:

> Hence, the test of legitimacy for them is not power's origins but its ends. And from this point of view, the "public interest" means just about what it has always meant: security and material abundance. The sacred king once had to make the crops grow and provide victory in battle. The government must now defend national security and enlarge the GNP. But it is increasingly clear that the nation-state can no longer guarantee the first at all, and that in the modern states the second has been accomplished to the point where it threatens the irreversible degradation of the environment and the species.
>
> We have finally made the engine that can smash all engines, the power that can destroy all power. Security today, bought at the price of billions, means that We shall have fifteen minutes' warning that They intend to annihilate us, during which time we can also annihilate them. The most powerful state today cannot provide security, but only revenge. There is not a person among us who has not himself imagined the destruction of all things by nuclear holocaust. Not since civilization began has man been so totally reduced to the status of temporary occupant of his home the earth. The dream of total security through total power has ended in the reality of total vulnerability.

The same general consequence has attended the drive for abundance:

> Modern production is dedicated almost entirely to consumption; and since consumption is limitless, so too is production. But to produce something means to destroy something else; hence, destruction keeps pace with production. There is the deepest law of modern production: it must continue as long as there is anything left to destroy. That is not metaphor but the precise dynamic of modern economies.
>
> Modern production obscures the sun, pollutes the air, and chews up great forests. It drinks whole lakes and rivers or transmutes them into abominations: there is a river in Ohio so polluted by flammable industrial wastes that it has been declared a fire hazard. . . .
>
> The modern state, then, insofar as it is provider and guarantor of increase, and insofar as its success

in this task is a source of legitimacy, has succeeded too well: its success has become a threat to survival.

Thus the "mix" of progress, the pursuit of abundance, and scientific-technological skills in the service of both, has wholly occupied the practical energies of the people and dominated the affairs of state. There is this result:

> We have no mainstream political or moral teaching that tells men they must remain bound to each other even one step beyond the point where those bonds are a drag and a burden on one's personal desires. Americans have always been dedicated to "getting ahead"; and getting ahead has always meant leaving others behind. Surely a large part of the zealous repression of radical protest in America yesterday and today has its roots in the fact that millions of men who are apparently "insiders" know how vulnerable the system is because they know how ambiguous their own attachments to it are. The slightest moral challenge exposes the fragile foundations of legitimacy in the modern state.

The main point is this:

> Modern man has determined to live without collective ideals and disciplines and thus without obedience to and reliance upon the authorities that embody, defend, and replenish those ideals. The work of dissolution is almost complete, and men now appear ready to attempt a life built upon no other ideal than happiness: comfort and self-expression. All ideals are suspect, all other straints and disciplines seen as snares and stupidities, all collective commitments nothing but self-imprisonments.

A long section is devoted to "the three great planning and control processes of modern society—bureaucracy, technology, and science"—said to be value-free and merely tools of the will of the people. But in a culture with no over-arching vision, they cannot be "merely tools." Their own instrumental values fill the vacuum. As Mr. Schaar says, "if you were to assign the task of devising a religion to a bureaucracy, you could say beforehand that the product would be all law and no prophecy, all rule and no revelation." In short, "the basic features and tendencies of modernity have produced a situation in which the established processes and formal structures of control are at war with the conditions necessary for authority. In this battle, legitimacy is destroyed."

What of the right sort of authority? Mr. Schaar does not neglect this problem. Ultimately, the role of legitimate authority is to contribute to understanding of the basic mysteries—"the problem and mystery of becoming a unique self; but still a self among some significant others, but still sharing with all humanity the condition of being human and mortal." A good society will encourage certain inquiries:

> Who am I as an individual? Who am I as a member of this society? Who am I as a man, a member of humanity? Each of the three questions contains within itself a host of questions, and the way a man formulates and responds to them composes the center and structure of his values.
>
> Humanly significant authorities are those who help men answer these questions in terms that men themselves implicitly understand. The leader offers interpretations and recommendations which resonate in the minds and spirits of other men. When leaders and followers interact on levels of mutual, subjective comprehension and sharing of meaning, then we have humanly significant leadership. The relationship is one of identification and co-performance. The leader finds himself in the followers, and they find themselves in the leader. I am aware that to the rational and objective men of our day, this is mysticism. But it is those same rational men who cannot understand why the rational, objective, and expert administrators are losing authority, if not yet power, in all the modern states. The answer is mysteriously simple: to the degree that the administrative leader achieves the objectivity and expertise which are the badges of his competence, he loses the ability to enter a relationship of mutual understanding with those who rely on him for counsel and direction.

There is a great deal more on legitimate authority and its natural expression and influence, but the reader will need to go to the original for this seminal material. Possibly it will later appear in a book by Mr. Schaar.