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CHANGING AMERICAN ATTITUDES

IT is difficult to find common denominators which convey the state of mind of a civilization as diverse as that of the United States, and are actually worth repeating. Bill Moyers (in *Listening to America*) gave expression to one when he said that the American people are, as a whole, "anxious and bewildered," and that their expectations are not being fulfilled. Those few who can remember the feelings of the common people in the days before World War I know that one fundamental change has taken place: we are no longer a nation of "optimists." Historians were able to sense this change as long ago as 1948, when Richard Hofstadter wrote in his Introduction to *The American Political Tradition:*

> The two world wars, unstable booms, and the abysmal depression of our time have profoundly shaken national confidence in the future. During the boom of the twenties it was commonly taken for granted that the happy days could run on into an indefinite future, today there are few who do not assume just as surely the coming of another severe economic slump. If the future seems dark, the past by contrast looks rosier than ever; but it is used far less to locate and guide the present than to give reassurance. American history, presenting itself as a rich and rewarding spectacle, a succession of well-fulfilled promises, induces a desire to operate and enjoy, not to analyze and act. The most common vision of national life in its fondness for the panoramic backward gaze, has been that of the observation-car platform.

There is no question but that the "politics of nostalgia" has been a force to reckon with in American public life during the more than twenty years since Mr. Hofstadter wrote this book. But it is equally certain that the conditions which might support a return to the past no longer exist. Again, as Mr. Hofstadter says:

> Although it has been said repeatedly that we need a new conception of the world to replace the ideology of self-help, free enterprise, competition, and beneficent cupidity upon which Americans have been nourished since the foundation of the Republic, no new conceptions of comparable strength have taken root and no statesman with a great mass following has arisen to propound them. Bereft of a coherent and plausible body of belief—for the New Deal, if it did little more, went far to undermine old ways of thought—Americans have become more receptive than ever to dynamic personal leadership as a substitute. This is part of the secret of Roosevelt's popularity, and, since his death, of the rudderless and demoralized state of American liberalism.

Attempts to formulate new beliefs in the terms of political economy uniformly fail. They fail, perhaps, for the same reason that the acquisitive society is itself failing: the conditions upon which its success was predicated are rapidly disappearing and some of them are already gone. The country is wholly occupied by people; there is no longer a "frontier." The costs of government and the wars of government have taken away the joys of wealth for all but a comparative few. The therapy of the struggle for existence in a natural environment is no longer available and mental and emotional disorders are rampant, while sophisticated preoccupation with personal feelings of frustration is even more widespread. An unreadiness to bear suffering may be part of the explanation of Bill Moyers' general impression: "I found among people an impatience, an intemperance, an isolation which invites opportunists who promise too much and castigate too many."

On what was the old "optimism" based? For its original and once elevated inspiration, we need to go back to the vision of certain eighteenth-century thinkers—men like Richard Price, and a few others—who gave articulate voice to a dream of the possibilities to be realized in the New World, as a continent of vast resources, enough to provide a good life for all. Yet this dream was too easily degraded into a lust for possessions.

Many fortunes were made throughout the nineteenth century, and the men who made them became popular models of the American Way. Many more were made in the twentieth, although the twentieth century also became a time of such rapid acceleration in economic exploitation of nature that already we are concerned about the exhaustion of essential materials such as fossil fuels, and are threatened by other anxieties.

Until very recently, then, the American child took in with his mother's milk the idea that he was born to good fortune and a privileged, happy life. If pain overtook him, he believed it was simply wrong, some kind of "mistake," and had to be stopped. It was naturally *right* to stop it. The susceptibility of American youth to the attractions of the drug culture are doubtless partly attributable to this natural right of Americans to put an immediate end to pain. The reality of suffering has no place in the American credo, just as the reality of evil has no notice in American philosophy. Evil is thought of as a transient invasion from without, like poverty or disease: you apply science or money or political solutions and *wipe it out!*

If politics is corrupt, if science has sold out to technology, and if you don't have any money, there are still some remedies to be applied, according to a more or less unchanged segment of the coming generation. You can cast spells or burn down a bank. Let a tantrum grow into rage and maybe kidnap a diplomat or a statesman. Borrow chants from the ancient East. Never mind that the Buddha found the cause of sorrow to be ungoverned desire and its cure to be self-restraint. Post-technological piety has many modern advantages.

But this is only the froth on the surface of the wave of change. Underneath, slow realizations of deeper values are going on. In the past, the solid support of American optimism lay in the vast store of supplies Nature had provided. No one could believe these supplies would ever be used up, since they were there for our use and pleasure by divine appointment. As Lynn White, Jr., has made clear in *Machina Ex Deo,* we had our instructions and privileges from the Creator. But now it begins to appear certain that the world is also for our limitation and pain. The new ecologists are declaring the *finiteness* of the planet. As John McHale says in *The Ecological Context:*

> The home planet has, by the second half of the twentieth century, become the *minimal* conceptual unit of occupancy for the whole human family—whose planetary interdependence is now seen to be closely interwoven with maintenance of the fragile balance of natural forces which sustain life. Man has converged on man and his home planet as the prime focus of his attention.
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> The sense of impending crisis and the pressures of accelerating rates of change are part of this process of convergence. Our world has suddenly grown quite small—and the successively impacting waves of reported change, catastrophe, suffering, injustice, and deterioration appear to become claustrophobic.
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> We are undergoing a vast evolutionary transition whose pace and magnitude of change-patterns is unprecedented in human history. This transition may only be achieved by circumventing the various survival crises that accompany it and are, by their own nature aspects of that transition—world population has grown to near maximum and the environmental deterioration caused by processes accompanying that growth already threatens those natural-resource-renewal cycles that make life possible on earth.

In short, it is now possible to talk intelligibly about the *limits* of the earth's resources for the support of life and not only possible but necessary. Mr. McHale provides tables giving the resources of the earth, and he shows the ominous meaning of the present rate of their consumption. Suddenly, we have serious responsibility as housekeepers—planetary housekeepers. We must keep various natural-resource-renewal cycles going if the next generation is to have food to eat and air to breathe. Perhaps we can learn to do this, but the ground for careless or unthinking "optimism" is certainly gone.

Of course, Mr. McHale's book, and others like it, will not be widely read, nor even widely

reviewed. But what he says, being true, and generally accurate, can only become truer and more important as time goes on. In other words, *eventually* a great many people will learn these facts, whether from the press, schooling, or from bitter experience. The work of another man, Wayne H. Davis, or the facts he presents, may become equally well known. In an article in the *New Republic* for Jan. 10 of last year, Mr. Davis pointed out that the average American consumes twenty-five times as much as the peasant of India, and that our rate of both consumption and pollution will have to be greatly reduced if very many people are to survive.

Yet it seems evident that typical American optimism will be worn away by other causes long before such realizations become common knowledge. Anxiety, bewilderment, irritation, alarm, scapegoating, tantrums, desperately hopeful "image" politics—these are not very good substitutes for the confident spirit of the nineteenth century, nor for its persistence, its sturdy toughness, its resourcefulness and ingenuity. In about five years we shall celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of the founding of our Republic. What shall we say to ourselves, then, one wonders?

For one thing, we might take into account that our cycle of good fortune, brief as it was, historically speaking, has made us vastly preoccupied with *ourselves*. This is doubtless an effect of being, in our own eyes, "the chosen people." Chosen for two hundred years, and then what? Peasants on poisoned and exhausted land for a long period of recovery? We're hardly prepared to contemplate any such fate.

Yet it should be salutary to stop saying to ourselves that nothing like this has ever been done by—or happened to—anyone else before, and give some thought to the vast tenure of certain old civilizations—the Egyptian, the Indian, and we might as well include the Chinese. They all lasted not for hundreds but for many thousands of years. They left high achievements in the arts and literature. We know something about what we can do that they couldn't or didn't do, but almost nothing about where they got their staying power.

Not much reading is required to illustrate the modern ignorance of ancient religions, most particularly Egyptian religion. The first, modern sympathetic treatment of Egyptian belief we know of is H. Frankfort's *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (Columbia University Press, 1948), in which the author remarks, in his preface, that the reader of the scholars then dominating the field "would never think that the gods they discuss once moved men to acts of worship." Dr. Frankfort shows that the Egyptians practiced a philosophical religion in which the rule of the law of justice was the major factor, and that underneath "the endless details of diverging local usages, traditions, and beliefs, there is essential unity in the conviction that man can find immortality and peace by becoming part of one of the perennial cyclic rhythms of nature."

Of Far Eastern religions, perhaps, we know more, yet until very recently have regarded them as too much concerned with "other-worldliness" and the "passivity" which we contrast with the progressive activity of the West. Yet these faiths have been a source of endurance and of balance over many, many centuries for countless millions of people. The extraordinary "political-mindedness" of the West is a very recent modern phenomenon, and while it may bespeak a kind of progress, when it leads to the obsessive powerhunger that has driven the Western nations to their present excesses, and lately infected the East as well, then an entirely fresh appraisal of the values which have prevailed in Western history may be in order.

It is not without significance that the pioneers of reform in modern thought often turn to Eastern religious conceptions for guidance. One thinks, for example, of Maslow's frequent references to *Taoistic* attitudes and his use of the Buddhist conception of the Bodhisattva. Or recalls that Erwin Schroedinger, in his critique of scientific

"objectivism," drew on Upanishadic ideas for foundation and quoted Sankaracharya in respect to the error of ascribing objective attributes to subjective reality. The influence of Zen Buddhism is too well known to require notice, except perhaps to say that the Zen indifference to "conceptual thinking" has been too much celebrated in the West, to unfortunate neglect of the fact that all Buddhist psychology floats in a sea of metaphysical teachings about the nature of things. In any event, nothing called "Buddhism" should be isolated from what are called the Four Sacred Truths which the Buddha taught in the Sermon to the Five Ascetics at Benares. According to tradition, this sermon was the opening act of the ministry of Buddha. The essentials are consolidated by Edmond Holmes in *The Creed of Buddha,* still the best simple exposition of his teachings:

> This is the Four-fold Truth, on which Buddha's whole scheme of life is hinged. Let us try to set it forth in other and fewer words:
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> (1) Life on earth is full of suffering.
>
> (2) Suffering is generated by desire.
>
> (3) The extinction of desire involves the extinction of suffering.
>
> (4) The extinction of desire (and therefore of suffering) is the outcome of a righteous life.

The author then remarks:

> There is one link in Buddha's teaching which seems to be missing. Why does desire generate suffering? The answer to this question is given in a discourse which Buddha is said to have held with the five ascetics shortly after he had expounded to them the Four Sacred Truths.

Substantially, this discourse maintains that desire arises in the impermanent aspect of man's being, which cannot, therefore, be the true self. When a man submits to craving for what is not enduring, or is not truly real, he exposes himself to all the pain which will arise from attachments that cannot be maintained and longings which cannot be fulfilled. Deliverance thus comes from the capacity to distinguish between the real and the unreal in the nature of man.

Expounding the doctrine, Holmes continues:

> Desire in itself is not evil. On this point Buddha's teaching must not be misunderstood. His disciples are expressly told—this is the very sum and substance of his teaching—to desire and strive for enlightenment, deliverance, Nirvana. Desire for the pleasures, or rather the joys, that minister to the real self, is wholly good. It is desire for the pleasures that minister to the lower self; it is the desire to affirm the lower self, to live in it, to ding to it, to rest in it; it is the desire to identify oneself with the individual self and the impermanent world which centers in it, instead of with the Universal Self and the eternal world of which it is at once the centre and the circumference;—it is this desire, taking a thousand forms, which is evil, and which proves itself to be evil by causing ceaseless suffering to mankind. If the self is to be delivered from suffering, desire for what is impermanent, changeable, and unreal must be extinguished; and the gradual extinction of unworthy desire must therefore be the central purpose of one's life.

It is not difficult to see why the Buddhism which gains attention in the West is usually an edited or attenuated version!

Yet we have only to turn to the work of a modern economic reformer to see how practical a leaven true Buddhist conceptions may be when applied to the ills of the acquisitive technological society. Writing on "Buddhist Economics," E. F. Schumacher observes:

> While the materialist is mainly interested in goods, the Buddhist is mainly interested in liberation. But Buddhism is "The Middle Way" and therefore in no way antagonistic to physical well-being. It is not wealth that stands in the way of liberation but the attachment to wealth; not the enjoyment of pleasurable things but the craving for them. The keynote of Buddhist economics, therefore, is simplicity and non-violence. From an economist's point of view, the marvel of the Buddhist way of life is the utter rationality of its pattern—amazingly small means leading to extraordinarily satisfactory results. . . .
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> Simplicity and non-violence are obviously closely related. The optimal pattern of consumption,

> producing a high degree of human satisfaction by means of a relatively low rate of consumption, allows people to live without great pressure and strain and to fulfill the primary Buddhist injunction: "Cease to do evil; try to do good." As physical resources are everywhere limited, people satisfying their needs by a modest use of resources are less likely to be at each other's throats than people depending upon a high rate of use. Equally people who live in highly self-sufficient local communities are less likely to get involved in large-scale violence than people whose existence depends upon world-wide systems of trade.

Well, these are more "heresies," yet they are at the same time necessary truths, in consideration of the present state of the planet's resources, and the findings of every serious investigator who gives attention to matters like world food supply and the ecological balances necessary to continued survival of the human race.

Fear, of course, is not a good reason for becoming a Buddhist or adopting a Taoist sort of philosophy. Fear is no better than an "economic" reason for human behavior. Men should always have human reasons for what they decide to do. But one can turn from the prospect of worldwide fear and desperation in the comparatively near future to a serious wondering about why our civilization has been so efficient in destroying itself, when other, more ancient cultures, however "unprogressive," lasted for so many thousands of years. Was it only because they didn't have "modern science"? It seems obvious that whatever the explanation is, there are many missing factors. One may be that their wise men had a clear understanding of pain and suffering. Gloomy some of them were, yet none of them reached the depths of the bleak despair of the modern existentialist, and in the art forms of those old cultures there seems to have been a loftier conception of tragedy than any we have been able to give expression to. What if nearly all our "progress" is concerned with the purely impermanent aspect of man's life, as the Buddha might have maintained, and as Plato suggested in his critique of merely scientific investigations?

These are questions that can be raised only in a report which speaks for minorities. Yet they ought to be asked. It seems at least possible that the asking of them may amount to a veritable clamor before fifteen or twenty years have passed.

REVIEW
NOTES ON AMERICANA

THE American past has so many skeins in it that no one book nor even a dozen can contain it. Yet there are books which successfully capture its spirit. One of these is *The Great Meadow* (Viking), by Elizabeth Madox Roberts, which tells the story of the settling of Kentucky. If you could give only one book to another person on the origins of American life, this book might be the best choice. It is about the movement of the American colonials westward, during the time of the American Revolution when Daniel Boone was trail-breaker and pioneer. The book sometimes seems a kind of lyric poetry, yet is saturated with the flavor of the people who lived in those days. Close to two centuries separate the days described by Miss Roberts from the very different period which Wendell Berry tells about in *The Hidden Wound*, another book about Kentucky, yet there is a deep connection. There would be a value for every American in reading them together. *The Great Meadow* is fiction, while *The Hidden Wound* is a kind of racial or community autobiography, but this difference does not matter much. Both books are about the roots and growth of American life, about American striving and American tragedy.

Some other good books about the early days of American life have been published recently. One of them is *The Frontiersmen* (Little, Brown, and Bantam), by Allan W. Eckert, which is history told as the story of Simon Kenton, another Virginian who went West to explore and settle in Kentucky and Ohio. He knew Boone well, was blood brother to Simon Girty, the renegade, and fought with and admired Tecumseh. Kenton and Boone were different sorts of men, yet they had qualities in common:

> Boone, a restless man, hunter and trapper, had come to the wilderness by choice; for Simon it had been a fugitive necessity. Both men, though illiterate and uneducated, were masters of wilderness lore, each was daring and courageous and both had shown themselves to be exceptional leaders of men at times of difficulty and danger. Time and again both had displayed a willingness to lay down their lives in defense of inexperienced emigrants and their families, and both were efficient promoters of the settlement of the wilderness.
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> But here the similarities ended. The refined person might have been shocked at the commonness of the rugged and vigorous Boone, but no man ever heard from the lips of Simon Kenton an obscene word or a licentious comment. Kenton did not paradoxically detest the very settlement he had helped promote, as did Boone. He did not grow restless when game became scarce and Indians even scarcer, when fields became safe enough for planting without men to guard the planters, when pastures became safe enough for fine herds of cattle and horses to roam and graze in peace. Unlike Boone, Kenton enjoyed seeing the new towns spring up and grow into thriving little cities, and he took pride in the fact that he had contributed substantially to their establishment.
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> Boone was the lone wolf type to an extreme, whereas Kenton enjoyed visiting with the settlers and feeling people near and around him. Boone thrived in loneliness, exulted in the sense of freedom he knew in the untrammeled wilderness; to Kenton, this same wilderness was something to conquer and bend to his will. If Boone s love of wilderness meant that his family must suffer a self-imposed ostracism in order to be with him, then that was the way it had to be. But Simon never lost his love of his own kind; moreover he wanted very much for his own children to have the education that he himself had foregone.

Why are we so much drawn to the reading of such books? Why do we *need* them? For need them we do. It is a part of being an American to feel that one has a part in this heritage, whatever his personal heredity. For good or ill, we are made of the stuff of these people, and we need to think about what has happened to that stuff as a result of the alterations in the conditions of our lives.

One of the first men of the New World to think reflectively about the character of the settlers was the French farmer Crévecœur, who was convinced that when a European came to America he underwent a radical transformation:

> . . . he no sooner breathes our air than he forms new schemes, and embarks in designs he never would have thought of in his own country. There the plenitude of society confines many useful ideas, and often extinguishes the most laudable schemes which here ripen into maturity.
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> He begins to feel the effects of a sort of resurrection; hitherto he had not lived, but simply vegetated, he now feels himself a man, because he is treated as such. . . . Judge what an alteration there must arise in the mind and thoughts of this man; he begins to forget his former servitude and dependence, his heart involuntarily swells and grows; this first swell inspires him with those new thoughts which constitute an American. . . . From nothing to start into being, to become a free man, invested with lands, to which every municipal blessing is annexed! What a change indeed! It is in consequence of that change that he becomes an American.

So it was a point of view, an attitude of mind, that made a man an American. And it was not conditions so much as release from them which triggered the great change. In an article in the *Atlantic* for July, 1952, Thornton Wilder sounded the same note. The men who came to America had one thing in common, he said. It was this:

> Their sense of identity did not derive from their relation to their environment. The meaning which their lives had for them was inner and individual. They did not need to be supported, framed, consoled, by the known, the habitual, the loved—by the ancestral village, town, river, field, horizon; by family, kin, neighbors, church and state; by the air, sky, and water that they knew.
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> The independent.
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> Independence is a momentum. Scarcely had the first settler made a clearing and founded a settlement than the more independent began pushing further back into the wilderness. The phrase became proverbial: "If you can see the smoke from your neighbor's chimney, you're too near."
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> These separatists broke away from the church at home, but separatism is a momentum. New religions were formed over and over again. Ousted clergymen went off into the woods with portions of their contentious flocks, there to cut down more trees and raise new churches. When Cotton Mather went to what is now Rhode Island he said that there had probably never been so many sects worshipping side by side in so small an area.
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> These were the men and women who were most irritably susceptible to any of the pressures which society and social pressure can bring.

From reading of this sort, slowly the portrait of the American emerges. It is not an up-to-date portrait, of course, but it represents the original stock which got caught in the squirrel-cage of "progress" and what for a time seemed unlimited expansion and acquisition. Yet the essential meaning of those beginnings remains: it is that the identifying characteristic of American civilization, so far as its roots are concerned, lies in a spirit, in ideas and attitudes, not in blood or territory or wealth.

The early days of the nation were occupied in spreading out, in taking possession, in having and holding—all activities which had not been possible for ordinary men in the old countries of Europe. And right at the beginning, even in these rather wonderful books about the settling of Kentucky, it is possible to recognize the seeds of the dark harvest of later centuries. Freedom, to the man who went West, meant freedom to take what they could. When, in *The Great Meadow*, an older woman tried to restrain the men from their adventurous plans, the reason in what she said gained no response. She told them:

> "Hit's Indian property. The white man has got no rights there. Hit's owned already, Kentuck is. Go, and you'll be killed and skulped by savages, your skulp to hang up in a dirty Indian house or hang on his belt. Hit's already owned. White men are outside their rights there."

But the men had made up their minds. They told her:

> "If the Indian is not man enough to hold it let him give it over then. . . . It's only a strong race can hold a good country. Let the brave have and hold there." . . .
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> "The most enduren will take" . . . "Strong men will go in and take." . . . "Strong men will win there."

Allan Eckert's *The Frontiersmen* has in it eye-witness reports of what may have been the cruelest mass murder of Indians in history—called the Moravian Massacre. It was accomplished by the betrayal of ninety-eight Delaware Indians who had been converted to Christianity by Moravian missionaries and who believed that their harmlessness and friendliness toward the whites was recognized and appreciated. Acting under a general instruction to teach the Delawares a lesson, an American Army officer persuaded these Moravian Christian Indians to give up their weapons, explaining that he would conduct them to safety during an Indian war. Then, after herding men, women and children into a single building, he allowed them a night of prayer and killed them one by one by blows on the head with a massive mallet, each soldier having a chance at the job of executioner until he was "tired." The bloody and terrible tortures of white men by Indians which followed this event begin to be understandable.

The figure of Tecumseh, a Shawnee, stands out in this book as a man of extraordinary character, head and shoulders over most of the whites of that time. Most tragic of all was his sense of the dark destiny of the Indians, and the dignity which marked his death in battle.

One more book should be named—*Raccoon John Smith*, by Louis Cochran (Meredith Press and Popular Library), another historical study in story form. Raccoon John Smith was a Baptist preacher and religious reformer who lived in Kentucky. The story begins about 1800. This tale has much of the flavor of the other books, and it fills out what Thornton Wilder says about the religion of the settlers. It is also an account of the struggle of intelligent Southerners to free themselves from the terrors of Calvinism, to which the Baptists were committed by their *Philadelphia Confession of Faith.* What comes through, as the religious faith of these people slowly becomes credible, is that they were doing the best they could with what they had been taught fighting to liberate their minds and their humanity from essentially brutalizing traditions.

COMMENTARY
THE "CONTENT" OF EDUCATION

IT seems important to recognize, in connection with this week's "Children" article, that even though the transmission of content is not the real task of education, "content" is still the raw material of education and the anvil of the learning experience. The educated person is one who is no longer the captive of any sort of content, yet he usually gains this freedom by a mastery of what content represents.

If content is neglected, or treated with contempt, the result will almost certainly be a ridiculously literal emphasis on goals we are all really quite ignorant about—having to do with "growth as a human being' and similar value-charged conceptions. It is one thing to speak of these ideas with respect, and quite another to suggest that one knows how to program them into a curriculum. It sometimes happens, of course, but then there is a powerful human factor involved—the teacher.

It is true that when we are fortunate enough to encounter rare excellences in a human being, we see that this development has no one-to-one relationship to any particular course of study. There is something "transcendent" about such qualities. But there isn't any formula for their production. We do know, however, that nearly all the persons who have these qualities have lived lives which were filled with "content" of some sort, and they forged the qualities out of this content, even though you can't trace the excellences to anything in particular. It is even hard to say what sort of content is hospitable to their development, although a claim like this used to be made for "the Humanities."

The conclusion must be that in any undertaking which has a high human end, such as education, the elements which can be given clear definition are not the important ones. So here, as in other areas, we are betrayed by too much insistence on the objective, the clear, and the sharply defined. Perhaps there should be a moratorium on educational theory, for the reason that it is extremely difficult to write books about intangibles, so too much is written about tangibles, and the intangibles are forgotten. Good teachers don't forget about them, but with the spread of the "systems" approach in education, good teachers find it increasingly difficult to teach. This sort of problem repeats itself, generation after generation. The best teaching, today, seems to be going on in little one-room schoolhouses in out-of-the-way places, done usually by teachers who are *left alone*.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
EDUCATIONAL REFORMERS

THE futility of thinking of education as mainly or entirely the transmission of "content" is becoming more and more apparent. Ortega's analysis of the false emphasis on "content" is in the first chapter of his recently published *Some Lessons on Metaphysics* (Norton, 1970). "Content," he shows, is what other men have found out, and when it is simply accepted by the student, without being again found out, altered, corrected, or personally assimilated, this is not education but a kind of fraud. So Ortega insisted that genuine education takes place only when, somehow or other, the student is infected with an irrepressible need to know for himself. Teachers who understand this recognize that students who have merely absorbed "content" are embarrassed by the idea of making discoveries of their own. So there is a lot to undo.

There is another and more obvious problem—the growth of content to ridiculously unmanageable proportions. Noel McInnis, director of the Center for Curriculum Design at Evanston, Ill., writes on this in *Change* for January-February 1971. He begins with a confession:

> While reviewing some old lecture notes recently, I discovered that they were completely worthless to me. All they did was remind me of much that I once knew. I had learned most of this material for the purpose of presenting it to a class, and probably forgot much of it even before the class did, because they had to retain it for an examination and I didn't. I wonder how many of our current lecture notes contain information that will be useful to us for no other reason than delivering it to another class. I wonder, also, how useful the information will be to our students a few years hence, assuming that they would remember it beyond their final exams.

The obligation, then, is to say less and teach more. Mr. McInnis proposes that the teacher ought to winnow the vast content of the sciences down to the simplicity of a few general principles. He doesn't add that this takes genius—since a great many scientists are reluctant or refuse to attempt it—but gives Buckminster Fuller as an example of a man who has done it successfully. Mr. McInnis, one could say, chooses a kind of half-way house between the exceedingly rare determination to discover for oneself, which is Ortega's ideal, and instructing a passive, captive audience. He asks the teachers to strive after "relevance." He says:

> We must effect economies of expression for two reasons. In the first place, those of us who received our basic conditioning to the world prior to the 1950s are probably miseducators, as we attempt to impose our own understanding of the world upon the young. Young people today experience a much different world than we did—or do now. Many things we take for granted confuse our students and alienate them. In neither case do we make positive contributions to their learning.
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> In the second place, our present methods of communicating often obscure meaning rather than reveal it. Conventional methods of instruction require so much telling (verbally, or in print) that our students get lost in the discourse. Their attention is so fragmented by the separate elements that they cannot grasp the whole. We often see the tragic results of this in our "best" students, who can repeat what we have told them but who cannot apply it in a new context, so that it means something. Their learning may have been comprehensive, but it has not been comprehending. They have taken it all in, but they have not actually taken it together.
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> No wonder. Thorough comprehension—real learning—is a process of assimilating experience by relating it to perceived meaning. Without perceived meaning (a good operational definition, perhaps, of the word "relevance"), there is little learning. Until the teacher has insured that his students' experience of his subject matter is perceived as meaningful, there is little likelihood that his instruction will be assimilated. About the only purpose it will serve is to prepare the students for examinations, the best of which usually will merely tell the teacher more than he cared to know because it has come back to him in the same form that he knew it.

This leads naturally to a new book by George Isaac Brown, *Human Teaching for Human*

Learning: an Introduction to Confluent Education (Viking, 1971, $8.50). "Confluent" here means education which unites feeling with cognitive experience. In his introductory chapter, Dr. Brown also writes of the meaning of "relevance":

> One hears much about relevance today. How, then, do we know when something is relevant? It is relevant when it is personally meaningful, when we have feelings about it, whatever "it" may be. There has been concern in the educational establishment for motivating learners, but this is usually only fancy wrapping on the package. If the contents of the package are not something the learner can feel about, real learning will not take place. We must attend not only to that which motivates but to that which *sustains* as well.
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> The position of most educators at all levels is that the primary function of schools is to teach the learner to be intellectually competent. The position is described by those who hold it as realistic, hard-headed, and a number of other fine-sounding things. Our belief is that this position is instead most unrealistic and illusionary. Oh, yes, it would greatly simplify matters if we could somehow isolate intellectual experience from emotional experience, but at the moment this is possible only in textbooks and experimental designs. The cold, hard, stubborn reality is that whenever one learns intellectually, there is an inseparable accompanying emotional dimension. The relationship between intellect and affect is indestructibly symbiotic. And instead of trying to deny this it is time we made good use of the relationship. Indeed, the purest, highest form of abstract thinking is coupled with congruent feelings on the part of the thinker, even in the grossest sense of pleasure, boredom, or pain. Or, as Michael Polanyi has observed, it is the passion of the scholar that makes for truly great scholarship.

This book is concerned with heroic efforts to put feeling back into the educational process, in schools. The work grew out of a program of preparation at the Esalen Institute at Big Sur, including the actual experiences of the high school and elementary teachers who took part in this program. What happened when they went back to their schools to apply what they had learned sometimes makes intensely interesting reading.

Reflection on the reports of these devoted teachers provoked the thought that what they did was at root an attempt to restore a natural quality to the human relationships which are found in a school. If children are left more or less to themselves, they don't stop learning, but what they learn is limited entirely to what they *feel* is worth finding out about. This is the secret of what is increasingly called "random" or "incidental" learning. The artificial and didactically contrived does not become part of their experience There is something, we feel, so good and right about this rule that places like Summerhill seem just about perfect, from what one reads about them. But as Neill would probably be the first to admit, not even Summerhill solves all problems. Having too many American children threatened to wreck his school, he said at one time.

The problems of education are locked in position with the problems of the community, and the real solution, insofar as *any* solution exists, would doubtless be the total regeneration of the community, so that it would function as a totally educational environment for the young, just as Goodman long ago suggested, recalling the *paideia* of the Greeks.

Yet we can't do that overnight, nor even in years. In fact, a very inconsiderable "we" hardly knows where to start. So various people conclude, as Dr. Brown does in this book, that "The greatest potential for change and significant improvement in our individual predicaments and in our dilemma as a society lies in the school." And if you question this assumption, they may ask, "Where *else* does any hope lie? How else can we start all over again?"

Well, we don't have much of an answer to such questions. But we worry a little about planning to bring "feeling" back into an institution that has systematically left it out by design and practice for lo these many years. Feeling is pretty spontaneous. You don't exactly "will" it into being. Acts of cognition are deliberate things. There is no doubt a natural dialectic between

thought and feeling in all learning—the "indestructible symbiosis" Dr. Brown talks about—but when you talk too much about the need for "feeling," something quite awful can happen.

Suppose we were to say that schools are places where children go because they want to be there for the best of reasons. If the reasons get poor, and then poorer, and finally disappear altogether, the name of "school" should no longer be permitted. Large doses of Goodman and Ivan Illich would be good to take while thinking about these things.

But then, in what are structurally very unfortunate situations, some rather extraordinary teachers come along. A really good teacher can make the best of a bad school situation. A good teacher brings the natural into play, by sheer human quality and warmth and concern and spontaneity. It happens again and again. It is illustrated in this book.

Is this done by "technique"? Well, these teachers talk about technique. Has love a "technique"? Is getting practice in understanding other people, young people, old people, the same as learning technique? To the extent that understanding the importance of feeling in learning helps a person to stop doing unnatural things in relation to others, that understanding is probably a very valuable thing. But the "production" of feeling—on the theory that people are pretty starved for it—needs questioning right from the start.

FRONTIERS

Mobility and Stability

LAO-TSE was an expounder of the "antinomian" tradition, perhaps its founder—at least one of its earliest advocates. Thoreau was entirely in agreement with him. As the modern nation-state proliferates laws, controls, and endless obligations and prohibitions, observant men predict the passing, the decay, the obsolescence of the nation-state. This is all in keeping with the expectations of Lao-tse, whose wisdom, once thought merely quaint, is increasingly recognized as intensely practical. The best book of interpretation of Lao-tse that we know of is *Taoism: The Parting of the Way*, by Holmes Welch (Beacon paperback, $1.95). In it he says:

> Lao Tzu recommends government by non-interference. Governments must by-pass the dilemma of action, recognizing in particular the futility of trying to control so complex a thing as a nation. Government controls defeat themselves, for "they may allay the main discontent, but only in a manner which produces further discontents." Therefore, "rule a big country as you would fry small fish," i.e., do not keep stirring them or they will turn to paste.
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> Government controls—and these include laws—defeat themselves for another reason. They are a form of aggression on the nature of man: "The more laws you make, the more thieves there will be." This is like the American Indian dictum: "In the old days there were no fights about hunting grounds and fishing territories. There were no laws then, so everybody did what was right." Lao Tzu believes that man's original nature was kind and mild, and that it has become aggressive as a reaction to the force of legal and moral codes. This is the basis for some surprising statements. "Banish human kindness, discard morality, and the people will become dutiful and compassionate"; "It was when the great Tao declined that human kindness and morality arose. . . . It was after the six family relationships disintegrated, there was 'filial piety' and 'parental love.' Not until the country fell into chaos and misrule did we hear of loyal ministers." Thus Lao Tzu reverses the causal relationship which most of us would read into such events. It was not that people began preaching about "loyal ministers" because ministers were no longer loyal: rather, ministers were no longer loyal because of the preaching, i.e., because society was trying to *make* them loyal.

One has only to reflect on the concomitants of the epoch of Joe MacCarthy to see the sense of this.

Did Lao-tse have anything to say about technology and "progress"? There is a passage which even his admirers have puzzled over, wondering what on earth was the point of such reactionary ideas. In the section on Government, in the Lional Giles translation, Lao-tse says:

> Were I the ruler of a little state with a small population, and only ten or a hundred men available as soldiers, I would not use them. I would have the people look on death as a grievous thing, and they should not travel to distant countries. Though they might possess boats and carriages, they should have no occasion to ride in them. Though they might own weapons and armour, they should have no need to use them. I would make the people return to the use of knotted cords. They should find their plain food sweet, their rough garments fine. They should be contented with their homes, and happy in their simple ways. If a neighboring State was within sight of mine—nay, if we were close enough to hear the crowing of each other's cocks and the barking of each other's dogs—the two people should grow old and die without there ever having been any mutual intercourse.

This may sound extreme, but the main idea seems to be the discouragement of *mobility*—a quality of modern life of which we are inordinately proud. Yet it is an excess of mobility that has weakened almost all the small towns in the United States, and brought sudden, pathological growth to the cities. This tendency is one of the effects of what Schumacher calls the "idolatry of giantism," which, with the resulting concentration of population in cities, leads to "footlooseness" among the people. This is especially an ill of large, rich countries, which have an "ever more intractable problem of 'dropouts,' of people who, having become footloose, cannot find a place anywhere in society." Further:

> Directly connected with this, it produces an appalling problem of crime, alienation, stress, social breakdown, right down to the level of the family. In

> the poor countries, again most severely the largest ones, it produces mass migration into cities, mass unemployment, and, as vitality is drained out of the rural areas, the threat of famine.

This comment applies mainly to those whom we call the "working class." The *Friends Journal* for Aug. 1/15, 1970, offers a discussion of "America's Other Migrant Workers," the upper- and middle-management personnel of large industrial firms which often have a policy of moving them about at two- or four-year intervals. Their children never have time to take root in a community. The parents are often disfranchised for a year because of moving to a new location. There is hardly any reason for feeling that one has a stake in the community when another move will come before long.

Worse than all this, of course, is the policy of labor layoffs—the devastating effects of which are now being felt all up and down the West Coast, particularly in Seattle. The writer of the article in the *Friends Journal*, Clifford Neal Smith, shows in detail that a quite different policy prevails in both Japan and Germany, and remarks:

> The argument, so often heard in this country, that the employer must have the right to hire and fire at will, is demonstrably inaccurate and self-serving. The economies of Germany and Japan are growing faster than our own without such employer privileges. The Japanese industrial employee is employed for life. His salary is set not by his job or his productivity but almost entirely by his age, education, and length of service. He and the company have mutual obligations and privileges.

These policies may seem distant from the question of mobility, but they have a lot to do with stability. At any rate, we have plenty of opportunity, today, to see what Lao-tse was getting at, in behalf of the conditions of a natural, secure, and fruitful life.