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THE LOST SIMPLICITIES

BY giving full weight to certain dominant patterns in the economic life of the American people, and calling attention to the dynamics of industrial growth in this country almost from its beginnings, it is possible to paint an unrelievedly gloomy picture of the future. Something similar might be said of the nation's foreign affairs, which seem today on the verge of collapse into total moral confusion. This is not the only way to look at the present scene, but it is a view which may be necessary to adopt, if only as a means of gaining the clarity to recognize what alternatives may exist, and to do this within the limited time that they continue to be open to human decision.

The economic fiasco is easily defined. It lies in the fact that the accumulating side-effects of what we call the good life are producing a very *bad* life, and the more we try to make things better for ourselves, in conventional terms, the worse they become. This is the brute fact, and we don't know what to do about it. Rhetorically, that is, we don't know what to do about it. Actually, many people have a strong inner sense of what should be done, and are accomplishing what they can in their individual lives, but they are still far too few in number to swing the balance of general human behavior in the right direction. A trite but accurate label for what needs to be done is plain living and high thinking, which, until now, have always been practiced by rather small minorities.

Well, if plain living and high thinking are necessary to save us from ruin, then people will have to be *made* to do it, won't they? It is perhaps conceivable that a determined government could make people live simply; Sparta succeeded for a while; but high thinking is much more difficult to enforce. The Puritans and the Communists did their best to compel "high thinking," backed by threat and inflexible social controls, but at present, in this country at least, it is a toss-up as to which of these brands of authority is the most unpopular and least likely to succeed. In any event, compulsion doesn't work. The general effect of all such efforts is seldom more than to make people think narrowly or angrily by reaction, and it takes them a long time to get over that.

Most utopians of the present leave the high thinking to individual initiative, hoping, perhaps, that it will somehow be secreted spontaneously by people who live simple lives. But they seem to agree that more than voluntarism will have to be involved to get the plain living. For example, as part of what on the whole sounds like a good plan for conserving natural resources and obtaining what Joseph Wood Krutch called "the best of two worlds" (both urban and rural), Peter L. Marks proposes regional governments marked off by great watersheds, with public ownership of land. Rapid transit systems would carry people to and from city and country. He then adds:

> To meet the need for individual mobility, automobiles (or preferably a cleaner and quieter means of transport) would be available at each of several subterranean storage and maintenance facilities positioned along the rail routes. All cars would be publicly owned and available to individuals for a charge to include both time borrowed and distance traveled. As in the case of other consumables, no more than two brands of cars would be tolerated, and not more than two sizes, large and small. One important advantage to public ownership is that not only would the best in pollution abatement equipment be mandatory, but also its proper maintenance, essential to its efficient functioning, could be rigidly controlled. It is precisely the lack of this control that makes Detroit's present efforts ludicrous; the burden of maintenance is shoved onto the individual car owner. As Garrett Hardin pointed out in an article in *Science*, reliance upon the individual in such matters is doomed to failure; the individual, forced to choose between making a large personal sacrifice (the increased expenditure for

> maintenance of pollution control equipment plus a decrease in mileage) and an immeasurably small communal sacrifice (the increased environmental degradation distributed over the entire community, caused by an individual's failure to abate exhaust emissions), will obviously tend to act in a manner that is ultimately disadvantageous to the welfare of the community at large. Under the present system what is good in the short term for the individual may prove disastrous for the long-term good of the community. ("A Vision of Environment," *American Scholar*, Summer, 1971.)

As presented by Mr. Marks, the claim that government ownership of land and cars is a necessary safeguard to the long-term public interest has some plausibility, but involved is the assumption—not made explicit—that a political authority like the government is indeed *capable* of serving the long-term interest of the people. This assumption must be questioned. There is little, for example, in recent history to suggest a serious concern for long-term public interest in either the conduct of the foreign affairs of the United States or the behavior of the agencies that are supposed to look out for public health and the preservation of the environment. In both these vitally important areas, the few constructive changes that have taken place recently seem to have been due almost entirely to the activity of aroused private citizens, whether one considers the desperate struggle to bring the Indo-Chinese war to an end or the attempts to eliminate the poisons in our food, in our air and our water. The spur of individual action, however organized in groups and movements, has led the way in what little has been accomplished in these directions.

It is of course a prerogative of utopian writers to suppose another sort of government than the one we have now. But this assumption has a corollary: another sort of government would result from another sort of people. And if the government can be almost unimaginably better, why not the people? But then, of course, we would not need the government as an enforcing agency. Are there such people coming along, and is there any chance of getting a lot more of them? Perhaps, if Mr. Marks had devoted himself to investigating this question, he might have felt obliged to write some sort of sequel to Reich's *Greening of America.*

So we are back at our original problem: What is likely to happen if we *don't* get enough of such people—people who, because of the kind of lives they want to live, will institute the necessary changes in the patterns of their economic and "national" existence?

On this question we do not lack for facts, and the best way to get at them is by taking a close look at the key issue in our environmental problems, which is the issue of power, or *energy*. There are at least conceivable or theoretically workable solutions for our major pollution problems, but the problem of energy, until it is dealt with, will make these solutions unimportant. The best survey of this problem that we have seen is provided in a series of three articles which appeared in the *New York Times* for July 6, 7, and 8, by John Noble Wilford, entitled "Nation's Energy Crisis." These articles were inserted in the *Congressional Record* for July 8 by California Congressman Chet Holifield, which makes them available from the Government Printing Office at 25 cents for the issue of that date. Taken together, these articles seem a masterpiece of blocking in the general outlines of the energy crisis which now exists in the United States. The first article begins:

> For the third straight summer Americans by the millions are living under the daily threat of power brownouts, blackouts and possible electricity rationing. But it is more than a seasonal shortage of power. It is part of a national crisis that won't go away—the energy crisis.
>
> "The electric power supply situation in parts of the United States appears to be worse than last summer," reports the President's Office of Emergency Preparedness. Only the West Coast, according to the report, seems assured of adequate power for the moment. In New York City, the margin is so thin that electric utility officials are counting on emergency gas-turbine generators standing on barges along the waterfront. Even so, there is no assurance

> that on some hot, humid day lights will not flicker out over large areas of the city.
>
> Nationwide, authorities in the Administration and out expect the crisis to continue for some time. In fact, they say, it is likely to persist for years, perhaps for as long as the industrial-technological civilization that has made modern America a model for many other nations continues to proliferate in its present form.

The rate of consumption of power is increasing much faster than the growth in population. "In the last fifteen years, total consumption doubled; in the next fifteen years, it is expected to double again." But the cost of these increases in available energy is very plainly a further degradation of the environment and more pollution. The enormous oil tankers that break in half and destroy beaches and sea life are built to meet the increased demand for power. The strip mining that is denuding hundreds of thousands of acres is the cheapest source of fuel for the production of power. The alternative of nuclear power plants is no longer regarded with unqualified enthusiasm, there being reason to fear the radiations which may spread sickness and death if they get out of control.

For world problems of this sort, America is obviously the test case, for we are the world's greatest producers and consumers of energy as well as its worst polluters. Mr. Wilford sets the issue clearly:

> Americans are 6 per cent of the world's population, but consume 35 per cent of the world's energy output. Since 1947 their consumption of electricity has been rising at an average rate of 7 per cent a year. Natural gas consumption has been rising at a rate of 5 to 6 per cent a year, with oil at 3 per cent and coal at 2 per cent.
>
> Last year, despite the economic recession and declining birth rates, consumption rose even more sharply. Americans used 4.5 per cent more energy than in 1969, and 9.2 per cent more electricity. If this consumption trend continues, Americans in the year 2000 would be using the equivalent of 76 trillion kilowatt hours of electricity and other energy resources—nearly four times the present usage rate.
>
> But will the trend continue? Can it? Should it? And if it does not, do you risk economic stagnation, unemployment even a decline in national power vis-a-vis the rest of the world? Can you accept the psychological wrench of living in a nation with its foot off the accelerator, after two centuries of vigorous and glorified growth?

Fuel is essential for the production of electrical energy, and at present all but a small fraction of the energy now in use resulted from the consumption of fossil fuels. Last year petroleum supplied 43 per cent of the nation's primary energy fuel. Natural gas came second, supplying 33 per cent; then bituminous coal, with 20 per cent. Water power provided only 4 per cent. Anthracite coal and nuclear energy supplied only fractions of 1 per cent. It should be noted that already the United States is importing a great deal of oil. More than 90 per cent of the petroleum used on the East Coast now comes from abroad, mostly from the Caribbean. We think of the great dam system of the TVA as an important source of energy, but only 20 per cent of the power flowing from this source is now derived from hydroelectric facilities.

While the sources of coal are expected to last three or four hundred years, natural gas and oil may be exhausted within a century. Moreover, some two thirds of the energy in coal or petroleum is lost by converting it into electricity, either through the stacks or in the water used for cooling, which is a source of thermal pollution. Meanwhile, nuclear reactors inspire ominous fears about insidious radiation leaks, and in addition to the problem of how to dispose of radioactive fuel residues, there is the fact that the reactors produce even more waste heat than fossil-fuel generators. In any event, the problem of supplying more energy and at the same time cleaning up the environment seems beyond solution except by pricing electrical energy at a level which will make it almost a luxury item. Finally, the men responsible for sales in our "progressive" economy keep on persuading the public to use new ways of consuming electricity. The craze for air

conditioners is admittedly responsible for summertime shortages of electricity in major cities.

In consequence of these facts and many others recited by Mr. Wilford, a few leaders are daring to say that America may have to learn to live without further "growth." Wilford summarizes:

> What the critics of growth are saying, in a word, is that the crisis is getting worse, and rapidly. Consumption of all energy sources is rising between 3 and 4 per cent a year, which is faster than population increases and basic economic growth. By the year 2000, according to some projections, there will be 320 million Americans (compared to 203 million now), and they may be using three or four times the current energy output. Hardly a shore or a river bank would be without a power plant every few miles.

John List, a professor of engineering at Cal Tech's Environmental Quality Laboratory, says:

> We've got about 20 years in which to reorganize. Population growth hardly comes into it at all. It's growth in per capita consumption. It's just plain affluence. The only way out of it is to curb the energy consumption per person. Not exactly a no-growth situation, but slow it down from this 9 per cent (growth rate) madness.

Even the chairman of New York's Consolidated Edison, Charles F. Luce, is quoted as saying:

> The answer to all of these environmental and resource problems is that we simply use less goods and services. In other words, that we get off this growth kick our economy has been on throughout the history of our country.

Well, it was Emerson, perhaps after Wordsworth, who advocated plain living and high thinking, in his essay on Domestic Life; and it was Emerson, again, who said that Things are in the saddle, And ride mankind. What elaborate scholarship and bitter proofs we require before we are ready to accept these simplicities! And then, of course, the simplicities are lost, since we insist on formulating very complicated versions of their truth!

Yet what Emerson says in this brief essay seems to cover the whole of the matter:

> Another age may divide the manual labor of the world more equally on all the members of society, and so make the labors of a few hours avail to the wants and add to the vigor of man. But the reform that applies to the household must not be partial.
>
> It must correct the whole system of living. It must come with plain living and high thinking; it must break up caste and put domestic service on another foundation. It must come in connection with a true acceptance on the part of each man of his vocation—not chosen by his parents or friends, but by his genius, with earnestness and love. . . .
>
> I think the vice of our housekeeping is, that it does not hold man sacred. The vice of government, the vice of education, the vice of religion, is one with that of private life. There is yet no house, because there is yet no housekeeper. As the tenant such will be the abode.

Power is a word of several meanings. People are restrained from the abuse of power by two causes. One is a sense of fitness joined with moral self-restraint; the other is lack of access to power. How much power a nation "needs" is of course an open question. Some now wonder if people wouldn't be far better off without any national power, and, indeed, without "nationality." There can be little doubt that the United States has had too much power in recent years, and no doubt at all that the nation has lately been using its power with hardly any self-restraint. In the *New Yorker* for July 3, William Pfaff proposes that the ill which now afflicts the country—the worst that has happened "since the War Between the States"—is an almost total loss of moral self-confidence. We are beginning to realize what we have done, and the senselessness of it. An early symptom of the disorder was evident, Mr. Pfaff suggests, when it became apparent that *how* we were waging the war in Vietnam caused more moral uneasiness than why we were waging it. There has been bad conscience all around. The doubts about *why* were simply suppressed as unbearable. We spoke of the horror of *what* we were doing. The

executive branch of government least of all consulted its doubts. As Mr. Pfaff says:

> The ultimate, if implicit, value that dominated its [the government's] action was power: power committed, for whatever goal, had to become power vindicated. The officials who presided over the war's launching could not themselves agree on the tangible interests at stake. The Pentagon's own retrospective account of those years, as reported by the *Times*, makes it clear that those officials did not really devote much thought to why there should be a war. America a decade before had set itself in opposition to Communist North Vietnam and committed itself to a fragile succession of regimes in Saigon. We were, as Walt Rostow declared to his colleagues at the time, "the greatest power in the world—if we would behave like it." We really went into Vietnam for no more complicated or subtle reason than to prevail: to make those who resisted us submit to us. We remain there today under Mr. Nixon and his administration because they still have not submitted.

This is the sort of writing that ought to be done about the war in Vietnam. It fits with John H. Schaar's searching study of the breakdown of moral authority in the United States (*New American Review*, No. 8). Actually, while Mr. Pfaff goes beneath the surface of things to get at the psycho-moral realities of American attitudes in the present, there is need to go much deeper, although he makes a fine beginning.

Meanwhile, it should be obvious that the government is not going to get us out of any of our messes. It will not solve the energy crisis nor can it remove the self-distrust that our ugly exploits in Southeast Asia have produced. No external authority can teach us plain living and high thinking. It cannot teach us religion, it should not interfere with education, and it has no knowledge of simplicity of life. These are all things that men must teach themselves.

REVIEW
"THE ANARCHIST PRINCE"

THE life of Peter Kropotkin, *The Anarchist Prince,* by George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, is now available in paperback (Schocken Books, 1971, 463 pages, $3.25). Born into "the highest rank of the Russian aristocracy" in 1842, Kropotkin lived through vast changes of the European social order, including those which took place in the early years of the twentieth century, and died in Russia in 1921, home at last after a lifetime of exile. His final years were quietly spent. The revolutionary rulers of the country had no sympathy for Kropotkin's anarchist ideas, but they left him alone. The people, however, loved and respected him and a great procession of a hundred thousand followed the coffin on its five-mile journey through the streets of Moscow to the cemetery. They knew him as a prince who had identified with common folk.

Kropotkin showed his intellectual abilities while a boy and was chosen to be educated in the Corps of Pages. He already considered the prospect of a military education a misfortune, and refused to use his title of "prince," but there were good teachers among the officers and he developed rapidly, extending his reading in every direction, including the sciences. The first major social influence on his mind was the writings of the revolutionary Alexander Herzen. Stirred by the breadth of Herzen's ideas, he published the first issue of a hand-written underground paper. He was shocked by the modifications of the emancipation law which imposed heavy taxation on the newly freed serfs, making a mockery of the reform. During this period, Kropotkin had fairly close contact with Alexander II, which gave him opportunity to realize what a fearful and indecisive man the Tsar could be. As the brightest boy in the school, Kropotkin earned the post of sergeant of the Corps of Pages, which automatically made him the Emperor's personal *page de chambre.* The authors see great importance in this experience:

> It was his first lesson in the uselessness of expecting anything from the hands of those in power; and by showing him the utter venality of courtly administration and the more than ordinarily human weakness of Alexander, it not only laid the foundations of his distrust of government and authority in general, but also formed the pattern in which the next period of his life was moulded. For, had it not been for this year of close contact with the Tsar, he might well have hoped to promote liberal aims by work at the centre of affairs, instead of, as he did, carrying them to the extreme periphery of the Russian empire, to the distant confines of Siberia.

Graduates of the Corps of Pages could ask for a commission in the army, and Kropotkin, seeking a post as remote as possible from the influence of the central government, requested a post in an obscure regiment in Siberia. After some objections by his father, which were finally overcome, he was sent to Irkutsk, where he worked under some intelligent and liberal officers. Then he accompanied a young superior to Chita, a small town which was the capital of Transbaikalia, where Kropotkin, now a youth of twenty, was given the assignment of collecting material and offering suggestions for prison reform. He researched the problem exhaustively, being horrified by the conditions he discovered, then prepared an elaborate report making drastic recommendations. Consideration of his report was delayed by the fact that his superior officer was denounced as having too much sympathy for political exiles, and dismissed. Kropotkin's proposals for reform were buried in the files. While he was given other tasks involving research, even those which promised to bear fruit through acceptance of his suggestions came to nothing because of the inefficiencies and waste of bureaucracy. Kropotkin was learning at first hand the stupidities, corruption, and futility of tile State. Meanwhile, he learned other lessons from the people of the region. He began to feel that advocates of political measures of reform and the exercise of state power knew little or nothing of

the real sources of social harmony. Later he wrote:

> To witness, for instance, the ways in which the communities of Dukhobortsy . . . migrated to the Amur region; to see the immense advantages which they got from their semi-communistic brotherly organization, and to realize what a success the colonisation was, amidst all the failures of state colonisation, was learning something which cannot be learned from books. Again, to live with natives, to see at work the complex forms of social organisation which they have elaborated far away from the influence of any civilisation, was, as it were, to store up floods of light which illuminated my subsequent reading. The part which the unknown masses play in the accomplishment of all important historical events, and even in war, became evident to me from direct observation, and I came to hold ideas similar to those which Tolstoy expressed concerning the leaders and masses in his monumental work, *War and Peace.*
>
> Having been brought up in a serf-owner's family, I entered active life, like all young men of my time, with a great deal of confidence in the necessity of commanding, ordering, scolding, punishing, and the like. But when, at an early age, I had to manage serious enterprises and to deal with men, and when each mistake would lead at once to heavy consequences, I began to appreciate the difference between acting on the principle of command and acting on the principle of common understanding. The former works admirably in a military parade, but it is worth nothing where real life is concerned and the aim can be achieved only through the severe effort of many converging wills. Although I did not then formulate my observations in terms from party struggles I may say now that I lost in Siberia whatever faith in State discipline I had cherished before. I was prepared to become an anarchist.

Always eager to go on trips of exploration, Kropotkin undertook a series of journeys having miscellaneous, semi-military purposes which eventually brought him minor fame as a geographer. While assigned to Siberia, he penetrated uncharted territory, made new maps, and finally evolved a theory of the structure of the mountains of Asia which brought basic changes in the existing system of interpretation. An incident of wanton brutality, the execution of five Polish exiles, caused him to resign from the military service. On his return to St. Petersburg, he was offered the secretaryship of the Physical Geography section of the Russian Geographical Society, which he accepted, entering a period of writing and lecturing, and planning other researches. It is evident that always the idea of land and water use in behalf of mankind was his fundamental interest. He was not, the authors say, a "pure" scientist, working in a social vacuum, but a man who studied geography with a view to human benefit. During a stay in Finland he had time to think of such things; as he put it:

> One idea, which appealed far more strongly to my inner self than geology, persistently worked in my mind.
>
> I saw what an immense amount of labour the Finnish peasant spends in clearing the land . . . and I said to myself "I will write, let me say, the physical geography of this part of Russia, and tell the peasant the best means of cultivating his soil. . . . But what is the use of talking to this peasant about American machines, when he has barely enough bread to live on from one crop to the next; when the rent which he has to pay for that boulder clay grows heavier and heavier in proportion to his success in improving the soil? . . . He needs me to live with him, to help him become the owner or the free occupier of that land. Then he will read books with profit, but not now."

Woodcock and Avakumovic now paint a picture of the various intellectual influences which were affecting Russian thought in the 1860's, and which would contribute to Kropotkin's views, although his first-hand experience in Siberia and Finland remained primary as the source of his opinions. First of all, Kropotkin was naturally susceptible to the *narodnik* feelings of the intelligentsia—the sense of social guilt and the longing to seek out and serve the common people. As a Page, Kropotkin had read Herzen and other Russian socialists, and while in Siberia he talked to men familiar with the doctrines of the nihilists and terrorists. The authors tell the story of Nechaev and his influence on Bakunin, and while Kropotkin shared in the intense commitment of the nihilists, he rejected their violence and could

not agree with their cultural reductionism and individualism:

> Kropotkin, unlike the nihilists, saw the value of cultural and creative work in developing the personality, and art in various forms was always a necessity for him. Moreover, there was a pantheistic emotion in his love for nature which was removed from the strict nihilist contempt for such feelings. He perceived that life must have other satisfactions than the merely utilitarian. Besides, his essential optimism differed widely from the pessimism with which the real nihilist regarded life around him. And, finally, while he had all the sincerity that could be desired, he never affected the crudeness of manners favoured by so many nihilists, and always behaved, particularly towards women, with a politeness that bordered on chivalry.

Feeling that he could do little for the peasants in Russia, Kropotkin set out for Switzerland in 1879. Here he would make contact with various internationalists and revolutionaries, and would find many Russians seeking, as he sought, a kind of education they could not obtain at home. With the fundamentals of his character shaped and the direction of his development decided, there remained for Kropotkin only growth and fulfillment. In Zurich he met Armand Ross, a disciple of Bakunin, and the conversion of Kropotkin to anarchism began.

Kropotkin was, more than anything else, theorist and educator. While he served years in prison, like other anarchists, his life was spent in writing and explaining, in expounding. We leave the reader to go to this excellent book for the full story of a man whose motives were always above suspicion, purely altruistic from the beginning, and whose ideas were deeply grounded in his own experience. It can be said that his mistakes and inconsistencies were always due to the heart-felt convictions and ardor of the man. He will be remembered for his distinguished book, *Mutual* Aid, which amounts to a refutation of social Darwinism, his *Ethics,* and his basic contention, in *Fields, Factories and Workshops,* increasingly acceptable today, that small-scale decentralized industry must supplement agriculture so that both activities may be pursued together in a balanced life of the people.

If the day ever comes when political sectarianism can be forgotten, and people no longer argue about 'isms, Kropotkin will be honored for his vision and his values, and his lifelong devotion to human good. *The Anarchist Prince* provides a useful bibliography, and readers interested in a brief but representative example of Kropotkin's writings might look up the article on Anarchism in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica,* which he contributed.

COMMENTARY
LIVES OF GREAT MEN

THE passage (in Review) quoted from Kropotkin's reflections on the plight of the peasants of Finland illustrates the conclusion likely to be reached by every man who makes up his mind to be of some practical use to depressed and deprived people. Planning and theory count for little in such work, at least at the beginning. The peasant, Kropotkin said, "needs me to live with him." This is what Tolstoy learned from his illiterate peasant instructor, Synteyev. As Tolstoy put in in *What Shall We Do Then?*—

> . . . we must get into human, that is amicable, relations with him. And so, to do good it is not money that is needed, but first of all, the ability at least for a time to renounce the conventionalities of our life, not to be afraid to soil our boots and garments, nor to be afraid of bed bugs and lice, nor of typhoid, diphtheria, or smallpox, we must be able to sit down on the cot of a ragged fellow and talk with him so intimately that he will feel that the talker respects and loves him, and is not acting and admiring himself.

From Tolstoy and from his own experience, Gandhi learned the same lesson. It was Tolstoy's idea that the privileged classes would have to get off the backs of the poor and begin to live by their own labor and industry. Gandhi saw this and made it, as Pyarelal says, the cornerstone of his plan to resuscitate India through the crafts symbolized by hand-spinning and hand-weaving and other lost skills, in order to create, in the end, a non-violent, non-exploitative social order.

Such men seem always to gravitate to the same essential opinions. As Pyarelal wrote in *The Early Phase:*

> Gandhiji held with Tolstoy that "an ideal state would be an ordered anarchy," in which everyone would rule himself in such a manner that he would never be a hindrance to his neighbors. But the practical idealist in him recognised that actually this ideal was never fully realised. For all practical purposes, some sort of Government there always had been and must be. And since no Government worth its name could suffer anarchy to prevail, a "predominantly non-violent Government, a Government that governs least," was the only immediately feasible ideal to be aimed at, a representative democracy backed by a non-violent sanction—not the total abolition of the State.

A non-violent "government" is hard to imagine, these days, yet we do not lack for examples of non-violent men. There are many, today, working in the Sarvodaya movement, and in Europe there is Danilo Dolci, who has cast his lot with the most hopeless and impoverished of Italy—the peasants and fishermen of Sicily—as the only way to show them what they can do for themselves and for one another.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE BASIC QUESTIONS

A THOUGHTFUL paper by a man active at the university level in curriculum planning and educational theory proposes that high school students could be helped to a better understanding of both the times and their own problems through a direct examination of the assumptions of the present society. This approach, he suggests, would avoid the fragmenting effect produced by the departmental divisions of the social sciences, as they are now taught, and would give legitimacy to the questions which so many students are already raising, as a result of their feelings of alienation from both school and society. The author hopes that such questioning might also lead to a regeneration of values, provoked by the student's own efforts to think his way through to what he really feels about the nature and purpose of man, and such critical matters as work, property, technology, and the environment.

Considering this proposal generally and abstractly, one cannot help but agree with its intent. There seems a sense in which nothing less than inquiry into the essential meaning of human life has been suggested by this proposal. Why, then, should we hesitate?

If, as seems fairly evident, the society as a whole is going in one direction, while the young, or a great many and perhaps the best of them, are going in another, why shouldn't the schools try to constitute themselves at least halfway houses in the vast process of change? And if they can bring some deliberation and self-consciousness to the enterprise, that will surely be all to the good.

Perhaps some of the schools—a few of them—will be able to do this. What we are hesitating about is the enormous maturity required for pursuing the kind of thinking this proposal involves. Take for example a quite particular question which raises the issue of human identity and purpose at a very practical level: the form to be filled out to qualify as a conscientious objector under the Selective Service Act. Quite normal and bright young men of eighteen have no easy time in filling out this form, which requires them to be philosophers, in most cases long before they have done any philosophizing at all. Maybe asking the questions this educator proposes would help to get them ready for such an ordeal, since they don't get much help anywhere else, except from lawyers or overworked draft counselors.

Maturity could be said to be knowing why you do what you do. A young man may know in terms of feeling why he can't enter into a relationship which will oblige him to kill or become responsible for the death of another human being, but he will have to conceptualize this feeling if he fills out the form. He will have to say who he is and what his purpose is in terms explicit enough to show why he is morally unable to become part of a military organization. He may feel that he wants to add a developed structure of ethical conviction which would have social implications—tell what sort of a society he wants to help bring into being.

One point of using this example of a direct questioning of the assumptions of our society is that it shows the individual making the inquiry as a human being in the process of committing action—he makes a choice and must articulate its meaning. This youth is a man-in-motion; he is animated by a specific moral energy and pursuit, *while he is thinking.* This, in short, is a real-life situation. What we are trying to suggest is that the best use of the mind, of its questioning, critical faculties, arises in a framework of deep moral motivation. The best thinking is done during movement toward some goal. Vision and commitment can hardly come into play except for the man in motion.

Even in the best of societies, you wouldn't expect the young, or the very young, to be self-conscious and deliberate in all they do. They would grow up in a harmonious, ongoing

environment, participating in community life spontaneously, following the example of others, slowly becoming conscious of self, noticing the need to make choices at various levels, step by step, each at the appropriate time. Eventually it is realized that there are *always* obligations and duties which reach beyond the present ones, even though the present ones may need all our attention right now.

These are very simple matters, but understanding them is not simple at all. Understanding them makes the difference between open and limiting instruction of the young. There can be love of country which does not shut out a wider obligation to all the world; there can be ordinary truths which are some day recognized to have a transcendental lining. Forms can be outgrown without showing contempt for them and for the people still confined by them. But for these intimations and recognitions to pervade the teaching of the young, it would seem to be necessary for the older people to be deeply committed, themselves, to the kind of self-knowledge that these graded, progressive awakenings suggest. They, too, need to be people in motion. A child, a youth in high school, needs vital reference-points along with the invitation to deliberate inquiry into who he is and what his purpose is. Without pretending to have any correct answers about such questions, we can say that the truth in these matters is bound to require extraordinary patience and a rare understanding of other people. Why other people? Because human beings are that extraordinary breed who cannot understand themselves without understanding others.

In other words, if we knew a seventeen- or eighteen-year-old who was to be confronted by the question of who he "is," we should hope very much that he would have the chance to consider the answer in the presence of some unusual human being—somebody who, somehow or other, seems to know who he is and what he is about. We think, for example, of Danilo Dolci. You don't "copy" such a man, but by having contact with him one gains an extraordinary sense of the fact that life does have a purpose, and that it must be good. Buber put this well:

> Only in his whole being, in all his spontaneity can the educator truly affect the whole being of his pupil. For educating characters you do not need a moral genius, but you need a man who is wholly alive and able to communicate himself directly to his fellow beings. His aliveness streams out to them and affects them most strongly and purely when he has no thought of affecting them.

If the young don't have any such contacts, the extraordinary ones will survive—one who is extraordinary carries with him his own materials for self-definition—but the rest may suffer from having to think about such large questions without connecting them with an inward feeling of the momentum of the human spirit. The fact is that decisions about basic assumptions are not made in static positions, from which one "objectively" surveys the field. Always there is a tendency, known or unknown, which exerts its influence. The vacuum of alienation is not a vacuum, but represents a stage of reversion to primitive forces or tendencies—not all bad or destructive, but not by any means good, and usually centrifugal in their effect on thought. They give no holistic focus.

The truly good society, after all, is as Blake suspected, a work of the sustained imagination. High culture is the creation of men of much personal discipline and articulated vision. An educational situation, in school or out of it, is a situation in which high culture either exists or is in the making, in which the human self and its purpose are exemplified in the round, rather than being "explained" or given verbal formulation. It is by no means clear, educationally speaking, what is the best time for verbal formulation. We do it, it seems certain, far too soon.

It may be said that in our sort of world, the young are having to accept the burdens of mature responsibility long before they are ready for them. That is undoubtedly true, and there will be a price

to pay for this enforced precocity, exacted from both generations.

But, ready or not, the young are more and more being forced to do the sort of questioning that has been proposed. They can't stomach the environment, work, and property they are invited to share, and are doing what they can to declare another identity and to find circumstances which suit it better. They are impatient of this ugly world they are in process of inheriting, and many of them would turn their backs on it if they could. Wherever they look, the purity of their nascent ideals is threatened. Often, the situation is much as Richard Sennett suggests in *The Uses of Disorder*. When youth, he says, are driven to philosophical self-determination before they are ready—before they can *cope* with the demands of having to stand alone they may lapse into a state of arrested adolescence, insisting that the world conform to a simplistic pattern which cannot exist anywhere, by reason of things done and undone.

Education, one could say, has been overtaken and passed by the historical process, and if the schools can collaborate in some measure with the changes which are coming so rapidly, the burdens on the young may be a little less. Perhaps that is all we can hope for, just now.

FRONTIERS

The Need of the Times

THIS is a period in which the members of "advanced" societies are finding out the consequences of the things they, their fathers, and their fathers' fathers, have done in the past. It is a time, therefore, of awakening to a wider sense of responsibility. We have hardly begun to *practice* wider responsibility, since this can come only from making responsible awareness into part of the actual identity that people feel—a practical extension of selfhood which still lies in the future—but the "sense" of responsibility is gradually being accepted, which is surely the first step.

So it is a time, not so much of action as of increasing self-consciousness. This means the development of accurate generalizations about ourselves—ourselves and our circumstances. And the best books of recent years have laid new foundations for thought at new levels of generalization. These have not been books of objective discovery but rather of subjective insight and assimilation. Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* is one such book. Lewis Mumford's *Pentagon of Power* is another. J. Bronowski's paper in the *American Scholar* for the Spring of 1966 is a similar piece of writing. Work of this sort establishes levels of thinking which, when it comes to maturity, generates new departures.

These books deal with the sciences. In an area that is perhaps more difficult to discuss, Charles Reich has provided some searching, often brilliant, and sometimes startlingly accurate generalizations about the immediate past of American civilization. *The Greening of America* has certainly heightened the self-consciousness of the times. Whatever his romantic expectations, *something* is happening among the members of the coming generation, affecting their spontaneous inclinations in ways that are bound to have far-reaching effects in years to come. Already there is a noticeable polarization of attitudes distinguishing the generations, and it seems almost certain to increase.

What may prove to be another book of important generalizations was heralded by a long article made up of extracts in the *Saturday Review* of July 24. This book is *Without Marx or Jesus* (Doubleday), by Jean-Francois Revel, identified as a French philosopher-critic. Revel maintains that a new sort of revolution is under way in the United States, that it is unlike past revolutions and that it is bringing changes which can take place nowhere else. The eighteen-page summary in the *SR* is worth careful reading. Revel believes that reforms have begun here which may proceed to completion without destruction of democratic processes. He also says: "The [present] American revolution is, without doubt, the first revolution in history in which disagreement on values and goals is more pronounced than disagreement on the means of existence." He provides Americans no grounds for complacency, although he says things that may somewhat relieve persons overwhelmed with shock at the present course of foreign affairs, and give pause to the angrily impatient. He says:

> This spirit of criticism of values, which is still more emotional than intellectual, is made possible by a freedom of information such as no civilization has even tolerated before—not even within and for the benefit of the ruling class, let alone at the level of the mass media. This accessibility of information has resulted in a widespread and strong feeling of guilt, and a passion for self-accusation that, on occasion, tends to go to extremes. And that result, in turn, has produced a phenomenon unprecedented in history: a domestic revolt against the imperialistic orientation of American foreigri policy.

Elsewhere, Revel speaks of "a basis common to all manifestations of the American revolt, and to its European extensions":

> That basis consists in the rejection of a society motivated by profit, dominated exclusively by economic considerations ruled by the spirit of competition, and subjected to the mutual aggressiveness of its members. Indeed, behind every revolutionary ideal we find a conviction that man has become the tool of his tools, and that he must once more become an end and a value in himself. The

> hippies are characterized by a particularly vivid awareness of that loss of self-identity and of the perversion of the meaning of life. A competitive society, for instance, or a spirit of rivalry, is a source of suffering to them. But they do not self-righteously condemn such societies nor attempt to refute them theoretically; they simply refuse to have any part in them.

Revel is no "champion" of the hippies' way of life, since he speaks of their political apathy, their neglect of the fact that their adaptation to this society grows out of its surplus affluence, and he notes their nebulous ideology. But these criticisms are irrelevant to the point he is making. As he says:

> One can jeer at their simplistic confidence in the strength of universal love as the key to all problems. And one can be astonished at their belief that it is possible for an individual to have absolute freedom without infringing the rights of others. All these things are, no doubt, open to criticism from many standpoints; and they are all no doubt very limited concepts. The fact remains, however, that the hippies' refusal to accept regimentation in any form gives them a mysterious strength and a means of exerting pressure; the same sort of strength and pressure that is exerted by, say, a hunger strike.

These young people, he says, will not take on a partisan political coloring because of what seems "a basic intuition that one of the foundations of need today is the elimination of revolution that we most pathological aggression."

This is but one of the many currents in American life to which Revel gives attention. In an afterword to the *SR* extracts, he remarks that the difference between what is happening in America and the traditional revolutions of Western history is that "profound changes that transform American society can take place without wrecking its institutions," and he proposes that it is "a condition for success that the changes do not wreck them." Earlier he had written: "We do not need a political revolution so much as an anti-political revolution; otherwise the only result will be the creation of new police states."

In any event, it seems evident that constructive changes have at least some chance of gaining strength in a society which is not paralyzed by suspicion and fear, through the preservation of its major democratic processes.