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PATHS TO QUESTIONING

IN a critical essay on Tolstoy, Lafcadio Hearn said, "Certain giants must never be judged by their errors, but only by their strength." This is a rule with wide application. It is one of our few protections against the delusion of the "latest thing," which makes people suppose they have some part in a progress which goes on over their heads. Even though they contribute nothing, they are able to enjoy feelings of superiority because of the "errors" of the great men of the past.

This is peculiarly the case in respect to the history of science. The great discoveries of science began by stirring popular wonder—a generally constructive response on the part of men who came to feel that they stood at the portals of a universe of living process which had been ignored for centuries, but which now, through scientific observation and experiment, could be fully known. It was an anticipation of collective experience of natural splendor. Especially for men who came to grasp some few natural processes for themselves was science an emancipating and immeasurably promising conception. While the idea of experimental knowledge soon became a polemical weapon in the hands of anti-clerical reformers, throughout the whole period of the rise of modern science men who found religion in an intuitive moral sense looked upon the progress of discovery as the unfolding of a vast natural theology, disclosing the play of spiritual forces which needed no interpretation from priests. As a nineteenth-century Unitarian preacher declared:

> Talk of Science as being irreligious! Science is creating a new idea of God. It is due to science that we have any conception at all of a *living* God. If we do not become atheists one of these days under the maddening effects of Protestantism, it will be due to Science, because it is disabusing us of hideous illusions that tease and embarrass us, and putting us in the way of knowing how to reason about the things we see.

But one thing over which the progress of science exercises no control is the changing attitudes of mind by which its achievements are regarded. If science, through its discoveries, could release men from old beliefs, it could also become a system of belief, itself. As Polanyi has said: "Today, when any human thought can be discredited by branding it as unscientific, the power previously exercised by theology has passed over to science; hence science has become in its turn the greatest single source of error."

But isn't this just a manner of speaking? The serious scientist is least of all inclined to claim final authority for findings which may, as he knows, be altered or amplified at any moment. The dispassionate study of objective nature can hardly be impugned because of the manipulative use of what became a common dream of mankind—the belief that science is the means to truth, and the hope that its truth shall make us free.

For a long time, the ideal of the scientist's painstaking search, adding little by little to the store of human knowledge about the world, attracted the best intelligence of each generation. And for a hundred years or so, books which showed how the scientific diagram of nature was enlarging, with the gaps being filled in, and which listed the new forms of energy and controls becoming available for use—these books had the role of stimulating men's imagination by displaying the endless potentialities in nature. But a time was reached when, at the popular level, the excitement of these accounts began to pall. The books, after all, had only a passive audience. Their effect on readers was now something like the response to a phonograph record that has been heard too many times. Yes, people say, the experts are doing great things with scientific knowledge. We are moderns; we understand that

the scientists have everything under control; but what are they going to do for us *next?*

How much of popular journalism in the field of science is devoted to answering this question?

Now this synthetic cultural optimism depends upon basic misconceptions concerning human good. It involves practical delegation of responsibility to an elite corps of specialists. In practice, it pairs complacency with hedonistic objectives. These are fairly ominous tendencies, and who, we may ask, should be held responsible for their development? Actually, with our present conceptions of knowledge and its use, *nobody* is responsible. These things just happened.

At this point we could turn in various directions. We could consider the lack, in any scientific theory of knowledge, of an explanation of evil. Yet obviously, the idea of science was not developed to account for evil, but as simply a means to get away from it. Science is not a moral language.

Another direction is suggested by the fact that while the general public was becoming complacent about the contributions of science—somewhat in the fashion that the adolescent sons and daughters of the affluent expect all their needs to be met, and without any moralizing or fuss—a more serious segment of our culture found a brand-new fascination connected with science. Not what is discovered, but *how* it is discovered, has become the important thing. This is a very practical question for research organizations, but it is also an unostentatious way of returning attention from the external world to man himself. We know that we keep on adding to our knowledge of the universe, but how do we do it?

This question has lately been generalized as research into "creativity." There is now an enormous literature on the subject—much more, at any rate, than there was back in the 1940's when the importance of systematic and continuous research was causing large industrial corporations to wonder how they could make it continuously productive. Administrators of research began to wonder if they could arrive at a definite "law" of scientific discovery. In the *American Magazine* for December, 1945, C G. Suits, chief of the research division of the General Electric Company, described a course in "creative engineering" instituted at the company's research laboratories at Schenectady, New York. One activity of the course was gathering information from scientists and inventors of known originality concerning how they got their new ideas. Apparently, the patterns leading to discovery had some similarity. Mr. Suits wrote:

> Whatever explanation you prefer, it's fair to say that intuition *behaved as though it were* the result of one's own mental resources operating in the shadowy expanse outside the spotlight of his conscious mind. The fresh patterns we call hunches invariably are formed in the subconscious, apparently because our consciousness tends to bolt the door against the new and strange. One creative worker in our laboratory compares a hunch to unborn ideas scurrying around within his brain, like birds inside a cage. Every now and then one of them finds an unguarded exit and flutters through into his conscious mind.

It is of some interest that in order to speak of the very *origins* of science, Mr. Suits abandoned the *language* of science. The randomness of discovery seems an essential characteristic. "Hard work," Mr. Suits says, "invariably precedes the flash of inspiration," but the intuition comes only when the mind is relaxed, usually on another subject. The explanations of "intuition" itself are mythic improvisations. One engineer insists that "intuition is an awareness of Absolute Truth—a sort of spiritual receiving set that permits its owner to tune in broadcasts of universal knowledge." A designer of airplanes—probably Sikorsky—is quoted as regarding intuition as "a new sixth sense, enabling its fortunate possessor to see ahead in time and become aware of future events long before they happen." One scientist feels the presence of a "guardian angel" who whispers advice and prevents mistakes, while a prominent chemist "gets the impression that unseen hands are guiding his operations."

There are interesting correlations between these suggestions and the much later work of men like J. Bronowski and Wylie Sypher (see *American Scholar* for Spring 1966 and Winter 1967-68). Mr. Suits ends by turning his discussion of the subject into a critique of heavy-handed tradition:

> Most of us probably live all our lives surrounded by great discoveries which we fail to see. Intuition rings the bell, but we don't bother to answer. Therein lies the big difference between the ordinary mortal and the man of genius. The genius is at home to new ideas. His conscious mind is freely open to these subconscious promptings. He's not held down by the weight of tradition.
>
> Walt Whitman violated all the accepted canons of good poetry in writing *Leaves of Grass*. . . . Children share with geniuses this open, inquiring, uninhibited quality of mind.

We ought here to take note of the fact that what Mr. Suits terms "subconscious promptings" Michael Polanyi, in *The Tacit Dimension* (Anchor paperback), calls "tacit knowing," which for him is the intuitive preliminary to all discovery. Polanyi makes this sort of initial "finding out" an intrinsic part of scientific knowledge. As he says:

> The declared aim of modern science is to establish a strictly detached, objective knowledge. Any falling short of this ideal is accepted only as a temporary imperfection, which we must aim at eliminating. But suppose that tacit thought forms an indispensable part of all knowledge, then the ideal of eliminating all personal elements of knowledge would, in effect, aim at the destruction of all knowledge. The ideal of exact science would turn out to be fundamentally misleading and possibly a source of devastating fallacies.

This is a big jump to take—to a fundamentally new theory of knowledge, or perhaps a very old one. The substance of Polanyi's contention is that knowledge cannot be separated from the personal act of knowing, and that the magical moment of discovery—of seeing new correlations of meaning open up—is the vital reality of knowledge, and not a once-important event which is superseded by repeated confirming activities. Polanyi has a decisive argument for this view:

> To accept the pursuit of science as a reasonable and acceptable enterprise is to share the kind of commitments on which scientists enter by undertaking this enterprise. You cannot formalize the act of commitment, for you cannot express your commitment non-commitally. To attempt this is to exercise the kind of lucidity which destroys its subject matter. Hence the failure of the positivist movement in the philosophy of science. The difficulty is to find a stable alternative to its ideal of objectivity.

This is indeed the problem. "Objectivity" is for us the practical equivalent of Holy Writ. Yet we are now beginning to wonder if the deliveries of "objective" science, in the form of manipulative skills which can be used by men who have no personal understanding of them, are not science in a demoralized state. It is at any rate conceivable that this delegation of power without understanding makes vast masses of population vulnerable to the dictates of an authority which is assumed to have access to knowledge not known to ordinary men. If this should be the case, then we have the beginnings of an explanation of why, with all the impressive achievements of the scientific age, more and more men are filled with premonitions of utter disaster.

It is not of negligible importance that Mr. Suits charges modern education, so largely conceived as the transmission of the formulas of scientific knowledge, with stultifying the minds of the young:

> What stifles the creative spark? It could be that our present system of teaching, both at home and in the schoolroom, squashes originality. "Education" literally means a "drawing out of powers within the mind. In most classrooms today it is anything but that. Instead of being taught to think, children are taught to parrot the great thoughts of the "authorities"—which all too often turn out to be wrong.
>
> If we want more Edisons and Whitmans—and America can use them!—our schools will have to de-emphasize mere memory drills and start teaching intuition.

This is almost exactly what Herbert Read has said for years about the effect of academic studies on the creative potentialities of children. What we teach them as "knowledge" in high school works out as a conspiracy against the spontaneous and free. How, we must ask ourselves, could genuine knowledge have this effect on human beings?

It is sometimes assumed that the accelerating interest in psychological matters, human subjectivity, and even mysticism, is mainly a reaction to the multiplying confusions of a scientistically oriented civilization, but this is only half the story. Science itself has been driven to consider the role of man as subject, not only in how we know, but also in what we know. In *The Step to Man* (Wiley, 1966), a book concerned with these trends, John Platt observes:

> Today science, from mathematics and physics on is acquiring a more subjective cast. Biology celebrates the individual; anthropology emphasizes his creative role in ongoing cultural evolution. Perception theory is showing that perception is mixed with action, linking environment with self and self with environment inseparably. Psychology is seeing the brain not as the slave but the director of its parts. And philosophy is teaching us that it is the *here* of being and action that underlies anything further that can be said about the world. We all recognize that it is our objective understanding of the world that has given us our power and achievements and freedom from superstition and fear; but it is the subjective that senses and verifies the objective, that touches and loves, that creates and pleases, and that we ignore at the peril of our immortal happiness.
>
> We have not always taught this, or believed it. Perhaps that is the reason for some of the great psychological strains in our society today.

So, once again, the old, old question, What is Truth?, comes up for consideration. It would not seem so frightening or ominous to have to ask it, if we had not been so sure that we knew the answer.

Letter from
JORDAN

AT the receptionist's lodge of the University of Jordan, six years young, occupying grounds which I once knew as the Agriculture Department's prize Experiment Station, six kilometers out of Amman, the main gate is open and a spruce attendant asks your business. At the old Experiment Station the gate was locked, entry being allowed only to those who held a written permit from the Minister.

The lodge itself is a fantastic creation of concrete, not unattractive, under a series of roofs which it wears like mushroom-shaped hats. Around it are banks of fancy, low-slung light fixtures, reflecting light downward. They would do a lot for a well-tended grass lawn; unhappily, in this climate there is none. Inside, a bare room houses one straight chair and an old-fashioned kerosene heater with a wick so smoky that the doors must be kept open.

But it is different within these new, gleaming white stone, centrally heated, main buildings. Here an air of bustle and purpose pervades the 2300 students of the three Faculties of Arts, Commerce and Sciences. Twenty per cent of the students are girls. The students I talked to were alert, neat, interested in a stranger, and although teaching is in Arabic most of them handled conversational English satisfactorily. At one point I faced a battery of fine arts faculty members, explaining my purposes for being there, and fielding shrewd questions about everything from my business to U.S. policies in the Middle East and Vietnam. The former subject was easier to handle. These professors were all Ph.D.'s, respectively from the University of Cairo (Arab language and civilization), Columbia (English), Michigan State (Sociology), University of Chicago (Sociology) and New York University (History).

I was twice told with some bitterness that the intellectual is the "forgotten man" of the Arab world. The professors have a feeling of being set aside, of not being given an opportunity to exercise their intellectual attainments in useful ways. I suppose this is so. Governments following a military or otherwise arbitrary policy may not have much use for intellectuals, whose job is to think, rather than to do prescribed jobs. Further, it seems to me likely that most governments in power in developing countries are adopting similar patterns and can hardly be expected to do otherwise. One man said with some envy that intellectuals in the U.S. are much closer to the seats of power and policy. Asked whether he was perhaps thinking back to J. F. Kennedy, he insisted that this was still so in America, even today. *Uhuh* seemed the best response to this view.

Well, what can the Arab intellectual do about his isolation? He cannot very well go into opposition, as his U.S. counterpart seems frequently to do. The mildest result of this would be a sudden end to his career, and imprisonment or exile, more or less voluntary, is not out of the question. He can seek international agency service if his Government approves. He can perhaps join the brain-drain, but here (and in Cairo the week before) I found no interest in this course. One phenomenon in this respect is interesting, and was presented to me twice during the day. The first case was that of a Foreign Service officer who asked to resign and accept an offer from another government agency, the Jordan Development Board, financed largely by aid and Foundation funds, at three times his present salary. He was refused. My informant, another Foreign Service officer, said: "It's too bad, really. He hasn't any money." This meant that he came from a family without land or business wealth. The second case involved several young Jordanian physicians. They were accepting contracts to serve in Abu Dhabi (if you know where this oil sheikdom is; I don't), and when I asked if Jordan didn't need all these young medical men, it was explained: "Yes, we do; but these are young men from the villages, with no economic background

at all. Having been educated, they cannot live on Jordan salaries, and Abu Dhabi pays far higher."

So, the University of Jordan—from its kerosene-heated lodge to its efficient new classroom buildings, from its students of village origin to its American Ph.D.'s, from its "forgotten-man" intellectual professors to its departing products—is a part of an intimidating array of new and undefined social forces which, if they are to be dealt with successfully, will require great ingenuity of this stratified society, full of rigidities. One can only hope. I see no real way to help.

ROVING CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
A KEY TO PEOPLE

PUBLISHED in French and English, *Bilingualism as a World Problem*, by W. F. Mackey (Harvest House, Montreal, 1967; paper, $2.00, cloth, $4.00), is a reflective introduction to issues seldom considered by those who think of language differences only as obstacles to "progress." Often there is unconscious cultural chauvinism in people who speak a single dominant language, and who regard their mother tongue as the natural medium for bringing the advantages of their civilization to the rest of the world. Early in his essay Prof. Mackey sets the problem:

> Some people have propagated the notion that we would be better off with only one language. For the more people who understand the same language, the greater the efficiency in national and international communications. On the other hand, from a cultural point of view, the extinction of a language is an irreparable loss. The side you take in this debate depends on your sense of values. But the fact remains that the widespread languages are spreading at the expense of the minority languages. Why is this so? In the past, one of the reasons evoked was the increase in political alliances; but today this is a less noticeable factor than the great increase in mass literacy, coupled with the recent revolution in communications. Language communications which a generation ago were remote and isolated are today open to the influences of direct and indirect communication with the outside world. And since communication systems tend to standardization, the content is usually transmitted in a majority language, often in a language not spoken in the area. With the phenomenal increase in communications of all kinds—travel, films, recording, graphic reproduction, long-distance broadcasting, and so on, this process is rapidly being speeded up. Already there are not many spots left in the world which are completely immune from contact with at least one of the great majority languages.

For one who speaks only a majority language—say, English—it is sometimes difficult to accept the idea that the dominance of his native tongue may not be an unmixed blessing. Since English is indeed the *lingua franca* of the world of technological progress, there is even the feeling that people who would like to be "helped" to a larger share of both necessities and comforts ought at least to learn the language through which the rationale of these benefits is best explained. Quite plainly, there is proselytism for a value-system very near the surface of all such expectations.

We learn about counter-opinions concerning language in two ways. When a country as large as India seeks independence from a colonial power, and when its leaders see that the displacing of their own language (or languages) in the education of the young will not only weaken communication in the home, but will also overshadow the values for which the native language is a living embodiment, the protest may become vigorous and explicit. Only last year, for example, the Gandhian leader, Jayaprakash Narayan, had this to say about the education in English brought by the British to India:

> I think [he said] nobody could do so much harm to this country as Lord Macaulay did. The system of education introduced by him had as its sole aim to produce black "sahibs" to help the handful of white "sahibs" to rule the country. This aim of education still remains. We have not been able to break the legacy. However, we are one of the few peoples in the world having a continuous culture over several thousand years. There were sudden breaks in other countries, but not so in India. What Macaulay did with us was to apply a sudden brake, to rupture abruptly that continuity, though he did not fully succeed. I do not believe that if our Sanskrit and Persian schools had continued, they would have remained isolated from world currents. However, Macaulay's English education cut us off from our source. And now our M.A.'s and Ph.D.'s who are educated here or abroad are uprooted people. They are neither here nor there. They do not understand either Indian or Western culture, for they tend to take only superficial things and fail to go deeper into the sources of strength of a culture.

Meanwhile, the spread of the languages which communicate the methods of technology seems inevitable. Prof. Mackey points out that "more and more people are tending to be bilingual through the necessity of becoming polysocial, that

is, belonging to one group for one thing and to another for another." And, he says, an understanding of this process is important in order to avoid "the disadvantages resulting from confused allegiances." But this applies mainly to the smaller countries which are practically compelled to be bilingual. Prof. Mackey asks:

> Do the people who speak one of the dominant languages as a mother tongue have any need whatsoever for bilingualism? Since their home language is at once the language of the country in which they live and work and a language in which all the knowledge they may need is available, a language spoken and understood in many countries where they may wish to travel, what need do they have for any other language? Because of these considerations, such people tend to harbour exaggerated notions of the importance of their native language.

A dominant language, it seems clear, too easily becomes the instrument of naïve cultural egotism. People who by accident of birth are obliged to learn two or more languages enjoy a natural corrective of this tendency. But typically monolingual people look upon minority language groups in their midst simply as "backward," and seldom have occasion to become aware of insights and attitudes which are preserved by languages they know nothing about. In the United States, for example, it has remained for a few scholars like Benjamin Lee Whorf to point out the subtleties of conception in the language of an indigenous tribe of American Indians—the Hopi. And at best, the rest of us have such realizations only at second hand, so that this second way of recognizing the values in language differences can never have more than a very slight influence.

Popular arguments about bilingualism are likely to be exercises in cultural self-justification. Since such arguments settle nothing, it might be well to consider the problem of "confused allegiances" in more fundamental terms. Prof. Mackey concludes:

> Much of the argument over the effects of bilingualism is due to the multi-dimensional character of the phenomenon and the great degree of variability of each dimension. For example, one immigrant child may benefit by bilingualism because he likes to conform, whereas another may not, because he resists conformity. The importance and weight of any factor varies from individual to individual and from area to area. That is why it is so difficult to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between bilingualism and other aspects of human behavior.

Questions of this sort are usually prejudiced in one direction or another by unconscious habits of thought. We have our reasons for thinking that other people ought to "conform," simply for their own interest. And the reasons they give for not conforming sometimes seem pretty benighted—based, that is, on conceptions of value which the rest of the world has long since passed by. A recent novel by Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (Popular Library paperback), set in Canada, seems filled with perceptive awareness of the factors lying behind the bilingual problem in that country. Early in the book we are given these reflections by a conscientious parish priest in the province of Quebec:

> The priest held an acorn in his palm, looking at it, then he polished it firmly between his thumb and forefinger. This nut was like his own parish. . . . It was perfect. You could not change or improve it, you could not graft it to anything else. But you put it into the earth, and you left it to God, and through God's miracle it became another oak. His mind moving slowly, cautiously as always, the priest visioned the whole of French Canada as a seed-bed for God, a seminary of French parishes speaking the plain old French of their Norman forefathers, continuing the battle of the counter-Reformation. Everyone in the parish knew the name of every father and grandfather and uncle and cousin and sister and brother and aunt, remembered the few who had married into neighboring parishes, and the many young men and women who had married the Church itself. Let the rest of the world murder itself through war, cheat itself in business, destroy its peace with new inventions and the frantic American rush after money. Quebec remembered God and her own soul, and these were all she needed.

Another passage, concerned with the land of the French parishes, seen through a train window, contrasts French with English attitudes:

> French-Canadians in the farmland were bound to the soil more truly than to any human being; with God and their families, it was their immortality. The land chained them and held them down, it turned their walk into a plodding and their hands into gnarled tools. It made them innocent of almost everything that existed beyond their own horizon. But it also made them loyal to their race as to a family unit, and this conception of themselves as a unique brotherhood of the land was part of the legend at the core of Quebec. . . .
>
> Across the aisle, two men were talking in English. Out of carelessness or indifference their voices were plainly audible.
>
> "This whole province is hopeless," one of them was saying as he swept the scene through the windows with his hand. "They can't think for themselves and never could and never will. Now in Toronto we. . . ."

This is doubtless only a fractional view of the Canadian situation, but it may help to explain why bilingualism in Canada creates such far-reaching difficulties. In this novel, which is a fine story, the English Canadians are like Victorian gentlemen who have been gradually infected with "American" drive and progressive self-satisfaction.

Toward the end of the book, a young man of partly French origin seems to put the requirements of synthesis in a casual remark. "I don't seem to be able to look at politics as a science," he said. "I look at people instead."

This could easily be reduced to a cliché, yet the refusal to submit people to the demands of over-riding abstractions may be the first step in the solution of many obsessing problems.

COMMENTARY
THE UNIVERSITIES AND "WISDOM"

IN the course of a calm look at the "crisis" in the universities (in the Winter 1968 issue of *The Public Interest*), Robert A. Nisbet, professor of sociology at the University of California, Riverside, finds that most of the unrest is localized in the liberal arts colleges, among undergraduates who suffer neglect from teachers who do not teach, or have become beguiled by "life-adjustment" projects. It seems true enough that the professional schools are not encountering the same problems with their students, who know what they want and are able to get it. The impoverishment felt so acutely lies in the *general* education which is supposed to fit students for "life." Prof. Nisbet has various explanations for this.

However, in developing his thesis that teachers should simply teach, and not busy themselves with a thousand other things, he manages some glancing blows at Robert M. Hutchins, of the Santa Barbara Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, and at W. H. Ferry, also of the Center. The sociologist objects to the idea that the university should be a place where "direct aim" is taken at wisdom. He thinks the conception pretentious, even distracting. He believes that wisdom, when it occurs, is a fortunate by-product of scholars practicing and teaching their disciplines.

Well, people who talk about the importance of wisdom usually get into trouble. It is indeed a kind of by-product, and hinting that Mr. Hutchins wants the university to be a place where people set up to "impart" wisdom misses the point. On the other hand, the idea of deliberately *looking* for wisdom is not so disreputable as Prof. Nisbet thinks. One may admit that in a university where wisdom had authentic presence, it probably would never need to be mentioned. And that even the highest good can be covered up by too much talk about it. Yet, in a society where the idea of wisdom as a goal has been almost forgotten, you *have* to talk about it, if the situation is to be helped.

That's why Plato, who had impeccable taste, sounds like such a hot gospeller much of the time. Plato was trying to compensate for the endless "double ignorance" among Athenians—by which he meant the ignorance of supposing things are going well when they aren't, and the ignorance of thinking you know when you don't. A more thoughtful critic would have taken this difficult situation into account. Wise men don't have to talk about wisdom, but ignorant men need to, and they need to look for it, even if this makes for awkwardness, embarrassment, and some false starts.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

IN BEHALF OF PERMISSIVENESS

THERE are and have been a few cooperative undertakings in education which have grown into models of excellence, broadly helpful to other people working in this field, not by reason of their theoretical explanations, but because of obvious accomplishments. Black Mountain was one such school. Summerhill is another. And the School in Rose Valley, in Pennsylvania, seems to be still another. This depression-born elementary school has been able to preserve a strong cooperative spirit which unites parents, teachers, and director in continuous concern for doing as well as possible what they are undertaking together. The monthly *Parents' Bulletin* of the School pursues its task of integration and self-consciousness with seriousness, yet with the light-heartedness that belongs to work with children. It also maintains continuous self-questioning.

The Feb. 15 *Bulletin* has a "Letter to the Editor" by Sandra Scarr which examines the meaning and values of "permissiveness" in relation to children. The letter is, so to speak, a systematic justification for the "act of faith" which permissiveness implies. Only one further consideration seems to need attention—the silent influence of how parents or teachers who practice permissiveness regard themselves and fulfill the purposes of their own lives. This, you could say, is the "invisible hand" behind all child-rearing activities, and is surely as important as all deliberated policies, however carefully conceived. The lives of adults inevitably create the cultural atmosphere in which children have their being, and permissiveness might be a glorious success in one atmosphere, but a terrifying failure in another. This subjective *elan vital* is the host of all enterprises in which human factors are decisive. The discussion of permissiveness appears below.

* * *

Permissiveness has some unpopular connotations, for interesting reasons, and it seemed worth examining why so many people find the philosophy threatening. Two issues are particularly salient: what does permissiveness in child-rearing and education require of the adults who deal with children; and what assumptions does a permissive philosophy make about the development of children? In the answers to these two questions lie the causes of permissiveness's bad reputation.

From adults permissiveness requires enormous self-control. At root permissiveness is based on the willful decisions of adults to withhold their potentially despotic control of children's behavior. By dint of superior size and total control of resources, parents can be tyrants; in fact the law requires parents to *control* their children above all else. Permissiveness means restraint by adults to *permit* greater freedom for children to determine their own behavior.

Subscription to a permissive philosophy is also an act of faith, based on some very optimistic assumptions about the nature of children and the course of their development. The first assumption is that children are self-motivated toward becoming adults. Children are assumed to be innately energized and directed toward exploring, learning, evaluating and integrating enough knowledge and experience to make them acceptable adults. Children are not supposed to be driven and programmed through childhood. Many parents and most psychologists would find these assumptions dubious and their ramifications dangerous.

The second assumption underlying permissiveness is that children learn best what they themselves want to know. They are permitted to use their self-motivation to explore and learn what they choose. Knowledge induced by artificial (external) manipulations of rewards and punishments is not thought to be useful to children in growing up. "Real" learning is acquired by the child for his own purposes.

Again, many parents find it hard to believe that children will learn anything *important* on their own, and most psychologists would find the lack of planned reinforcement unfortunate.

Permissiveness rests on a still third assumption that respect for individual differences in interests, abilities, temperaments and so forth is essential if children are to grow into healthy adults. Hidden here is an emphasis on the genetic basis of individual differences. Permissiveness prescribes parental responsiveness to individual difference beginning at birth with self-demand schedules and rejects adherence to general norms of behavior. While most parents recognize individual differences, they also have dreams and ambitions for their children. They expect that they will meet societal standards of proper behavior, sooner rather than later. Most psychologists have not been particularly interested in individual differences in behavior (other than test behavior) and would side with parents who want to train their children to be proper adults.

The great faith that one must have in the unmolested development of children is reason enough for the unpopularity of permissiveness. One has only to look around at all the twisted, deceitful, perverted adults to feel sure that human beings need a great deal of straightening out. To risk one's own children's welfare for some idealistic nonsense must seem unnecessary and dangerous to many adults. Add to the faith-in-mankind requirement a great deal of self-restraint, and you have a measure of the rigorous dedication required of permissive adults.

For the empiricist the worth of permissiveness is in the effects it can have on children's growth. . . . I must have some measurable *results.* What hypotheses about behavior can be generated from the assumptions underlying permissiveness, and do the hypotheses find any empirical support?

Briefly, several hypotheses about intrinsic motivation—its presence, potency, direction and hierarchical placement in a list of motives—have been tested with primates. Primates are generally found to be highly curious, motivated to explore and learn anything moderately novel. These findings reflect well on the first assumption that children will be self-motivated toward experiences.

The second assumption about learning generates hypotheses about the effects of learning under differing drive states and under different schedules of reinforcement. The findings are generally that the best *performances* occur under deficit drives and external manipulations of rewards and punishment, which are not necessary for learning. At least there is no empirical evidence that unmanipulated learning is less efficient if the material to be learned is even slightly interesting.

The third assumption about individual differences is the most interesting to me because human behavior genetics is just now exploring the many human behaviors that develop from the interaction of individual genotypes and individual environments. It looks as though some basic human personality characteristics are not easily malleable to a standard mold. Quiet children are not easily made noisy and extraverted, nor are real extraverts easily trained to be quiet and withdrawn. The environmental manipulations required to produce the same kinds of behaviors in all children would be extremely damaging to the children who differ most from the expected norms. Even if conformity could be trained in behaviors and abilities (it likely cannot be anyway), the psychological cost would be high.

In summary, it seems to me that permissiveness is based on some pretty good assumptions that generate hypotheses of real merit. The recent interest of psychologists in intrinsic motivation, learning vs. performance, and individual differences suggest that empiricism may yet catch up with permissiveness and support some of the conclusions others reached forty years ago.

FRONTIERS

Report on Institutions

THE great majority of the people in the world still seem to cherish the hope that their dreams can be fulfilled through institutional change or reform. Yet there is hardly a clear understanding of whether institutions are the actual agents of constructive change, or only its rationalizing reflectors.

A great deal of the argument about how to bring about desired changes in the United States, for example, turns on the issue of whether we ought to strengthen and increase the authority of local government, or seek through federal measures to overcome the backwardness and inefficiencies of certain areas of the country. In the War on Poverty, for example, both principles are recognized. The social science and planning resources on which the federal government can draw are joined with its financial power, and then, out of respect for "grass-roots" authority, the program is turned over to local institutions for administration. Theoretically sound enough, this division of responsibility seems to indulge the very weaknesses the central authority was intended to correct. In a review of the U.S. anti-poverty program in *Our Generation* (Vol. V, No. 3), David Nolan, a student of political science, summarizes the benefits which might have come to poor Negroes in the South, and then observes:

> It is a sad commentary that given these alternatives, the Office of Economic Opportunity, under political pressure, decided to discard the provision for "maximum feasible participation of the poor" and permit local poverty programs to be run by whites who profited from poverty by owning slums, underpaying workers, gouging debtors, and the like. This is the built-in contradiction of the War on Poverty.

Mr. Nolan cites specific illustrations of this sort of defeat of the program in Virginia and Mississippi. One can hardly avoid the conclusion that no amount of either money or power can effectively serve the general good, so long as the institutions through which it is channeled are morally inert or corrupt. Extremely pertinent here are some recent remarks by John W. Gardner (who resigned from his post as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare on March 1), printed in the *New Leader* for Feb. 12. Under the title, "A Nation in Deep Trouble," Mr. Gardner said:

> As things stand now, modern man believes—if only with half his mind—that his institutions can accomplish just about anything. The fact that they fall very far short of that goal is due, he feels, to the prevalence of people who love power or money more than they love mankind. I find an appealing (or appalling) innocence in this view. I have had ample opportunity over the years to observe the diverse institutions of this society—the colleges and universities, the military services, business corporations, foundations, professions, government agencies, and so on. And I must report that even excellent institutions run by excellent human beings are inherently sluggish, *not* hungry for innovation, *not* quick to respond to human need, *not* eager to reshape themselves to meet the challenge of the times.

There is a direct relationship between this exaggerated faith in institutions and the sense of powerlessness so effectively discussed here in last week's MANAS. Further observations by Mr. Gardner, while not directly on the subject of powerlessness, show how powerlessness follows from blind faith in institutions, and how it and related feelings are exploited by "leaders":

> The modern belief that man's institutions can accomplish just about anything he wants, when he wants, has led to certain characteristic contemporary phenomena. One is the bitterness and anger that occur when high hopes turn sour. No observer of the current scene has failed to note the cynicism prevalent today toward all leaders, all officials, all social institutions. That cynicism is continually fed by the rage of people who expected too much in the first place and got too little in the end.
>
> While aspirations are healthy in themselves, soaring hope followed by rude disappointment is a formula for trouble. It breeds leaders whose whole stock in trade is to exploit first the aspirations and then the disappointment. These men profit on both the ups and the downs of the market.

> The roller coaster of aspiration and disillusionment is amusing to the extreme conservative, who thought the high hopes silly in the first place. It gives satisfaction to the Left-wing nihilist who thinks the whole system should be brought down anyway. It is a gold mine for mountebanks willing to promise anything and exploit every emotion. And it is a devastating whipsaw for serious and responsible leaders.

"How," Mr. Gardner asks, "can we make sluggish institutions more responsive to human need and to the requirements of change?"

A more important question, it seems to us, is whether anything important can be accomplished by attempting to patch up or reanimate institutions which have been subject to angry political controversy for so long that partisan judgments of them, both for and against, are practically native to their being. The object, in all likelihood, rather ought to be to reduce this fruitless controversy by making new beginnings which rely less on institutional forms and the delegation of power. This, in effect, is what Henry Anderson proposed, and is implicit throughout the entire category of voluntaristic, counter-society proposals.

Today, the political act, for the great majority of citizens, is no more than an exercise of a tiny pittance of power, a power which soon loses its moral content from impersonal transfer. And we have before us numerous object lessons in the law of diminishing returns from the use of delegated power. What is wanted, then, instead of the one-man-one-vote sort of power, is the creation by individuals and small groups of actual *fields* of personal contribution to human need at various levels—spontaneous, free, and imaginatively diverse. Eventually, from such efforts, we might learn practical rules about the limits of what can be done through institutions, and be better able to tell in advance what sorts of constructive activity will languish and decline when left to institutional control.

An excess of faith in institutions cannot be corrected from passionless objective "study" of how they work, since such studies present no alternatives. Reduction of the role of institutions can come only from people who begin to do themselves what institutions have failed to do, and in this way grow into an understanding of how to use them with greater success.

Academically oriented research concerning institutions can be exquisitely balanced, filled with wise insights and sage commentary, and still be barren of result. Such scholarship is indeed objective, and therefore of stationary origin, while knowledge of change can come only out of work by men in motion, participating in acts of change. But even here, the blight of objectivity brings confusion. To act, for many scholars, is simply to make another "objective study" of the status quo.

Since criticism of institutions almost always sounds like a plea for abandoning all institutions—which is manifestly impossible—some further observations by Mr. Gardner are pertinent:

> I am not suggesting a polarity between men and their institutions—men eager for change, institutions blocking it. Institutions after all, are run by men, and often those who appear most eager for change oppose it most stubbornly when their own institutions are involved. I give you the university professor, a great friend of the reformer, provided the patterns of academic life are not affected. His motto is "Innovate away from home." We are going to have to do a far more imaginative and aggressive job of renewing, redesigning, revitalizing our institutions if we are to meet today's challenges.

Well, yes and no. At any rate, sound decisions concerning what to redesign and what to desert as unworthy of effort will never be reached by institutional criteria, which are largely determined by appearances. Until the matters under consideration are enough developed—sufficiently *rigid*, you might say, to have an appearance—a conscientious observer is not supposed to notice them at all.