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THE UNIVERSAL EXPEDIENTS

ONCE, on a journey to Italy, Goethe found himself in the company of an Italian captain who was prone to offering advice. Seeing that the poet was given to spells of solitude, of wandering off in his head, the captain exclaimed:

> What are you thinking about! One ought never to think, thinking ages one! One should never confine oneself to a single thing because he then goes mad: *he needs to have a thousand things, a confusion in his head.*

Naturally enough, this cracker barrel philosophy made little impression on Goethe, except to provide him an illustration of the Latin distaste for abstract ideas. Yet, in a shallow, distorted way, the captain was a therapist. While it was a foolish thing to say to Goethe, his half truth can be remodelled into a counsel of some merit for a generation of people whose heads are filled with abstractions before they know how to hammer a nail, whittle a stick, or dig a trench.

There is indeed a normality and health of the active life—a balanced metabolism of the whole man which works to deepen thought when it is framed by symmetries of experience. Raised and schooled in the languors and leisures of the post-industrial age, our generation has more familiarity with generalizations about life than with life itself. Our long thoughts have hardly any roots. It seems a somewhat neurotic compensation that we play at being outdoor people. You meet more booted "frontiersmen" on the streets of New York—miles away from the nearest raw dirt—than you could encounter in a country town. With sure instinct, the designers of billboard advertisements picture virile embodiments of cow-country manhood to tell us which brand of cigarettes will give us a renewal of primitive virtue. They know that everybody feels out of shape, these days. Even the folksingers sense the common need and longing—they all acquire Arkansaw accents.

Well, this acting out, no matter what trivial compensations we adopt; conceals authentic longing. We are deprived of an essential balance in our lives. Few modern men know how to work up a sweat to take their minds off their troubles. There's nothing to do except aimless jogging or a round of golf. The modern father is as badly off as his adolescent son who has no demand on his energies beyond mowing the silly lawn or washing the dishes.

Without the whip of material necessity, people think too much about themselves, about how they *feel*—as if some monumental importance attached to each little tremor of the emotional weathervane—and whether or not they are *happy.* Technology, you could say—technology and an excess of prosperity—has eliminated the natural therapy of direct encounter with the physical world. We could have seen this coming, since it happened, years ago, in the American South, where black people were obliged for centuries to have this encounter as unpaid substitutes for the white people. While slavery was a moral crime against the blacks, it was self-mutilation for the whites. They revelled in being unnatural. As Wendell Berry showed in *The Hidden Wound,* the white Southerners who had black people to do their natural toil grew ignorant of this side of life. They thought they were a new Athenian elite, but they were only anachronisms, and blighted by vanity, besides.

And now machines are doing for us what the blacks once did for the Southerners, with the same distorting effect on our lives. Might it be that the machines, which are praised for giving us more time to play, to enjoy "culture," and to "think," have come too soon to do us any good—before

we know how to use them; that we are just not ready to have time on our hands, nor inwardly mature enough to eat food we didn't raise or live in houses we didn't build. At any rate, we are finding out that the food we get this way is not nourishing, while too many of the houses built by other people are slums.

Well, how *should* we have expended our energies and arranged our lives? Dozens of writers, from Carlyle to Gandhi, have attempted to advise us on this question, without much effect. Apparently, when people don't *take* wise advice, the world goes off in a bad direction, and this makes the few who give the advice sound like "extremists." The worse things get, the stronger the advice must become, until finally simple sanity sounds like madness.

What happens to people who isolate themselves from the natural environment? William Barrett makes one answer in *Irrational Man:*

> The last gigantic step forward in the spread of technologism has been the development of mass art and mass media of communication: the machine no longer fabricates only material products; it also makes minds. Millions of people live by the stereotypes of mass art, the most virulent form of abstractness, and their capacity for any kind of human reality is fast disappearing. If here and there in the lonely crowd (discovered by Kierkegaard long before David Riesman) a face is lit up by a human gleam, it quickly goes vacant again in the hypnotized stare at the TV screen. When an eclipse of the moon was televised some years ago, E. B. White wrote in *The New Yorker* that he felt some drastic turning point in history had arrived: people could have seen the real thing by looking out of their windows, but instead they preferred looking at the *reflection* of it on the screen. Kierkegaard condemned the abstractness of his time, calling it an Age of Reflection, but what he seems chiefly to have had in mind was the abstractness of the professorial intellectual, seeing not real life but the reflection of it in his own mind. We, however, have fabricated for our time a new kind of abstractness, on a mass scale; through our extraordinary mastery of technique we provide a ready-made reflection in place of the real, and not for university dons but for the millions. Our journey into untruth has gone farther than Kierkegaard could have imagined.

This "abstractness" is surely a sickness in itself, having far-reaching effects on everyday thought, casual converse, the arts, and "normal" reactions to experience. In years past, before technology curtained off the natural world, we could face ordinary vicissitudes without having to have an accounting for every little pain or minor disaster. If it didn't rain, it didn't rain, and people made the best of it. Today, when something we don't like happens, we demand a scapegoat. For the troubles experienced in a man-made world, it seems logical to hold human beings responsible. This gives a harsh moral tone to most communication. There are hardly any "unknowns" left, no mystery about things. Man, not Nature, is in charge; he is the stage-manager of the show of life, and when the production is faulty some kind of "revolution" is the only remedy.

No one is permitted Stoic calm or resignation toward the endless misfortunes of international and domestic affairs; no placid truism about the flaws in human nature will reconcile us to a gasoline shortage, pollution of the beaches, oil spills, and other spreading wastes of industry. The grime and garbage of the cities, the impoverished decline of rural areas, the monotonous triviality of "the media," the transparent hypocrisy of most politicians—our troubles now have all a human origin. *Somebody* must be to blame.

And all this comes at a time in history called "the end of ideology," when—to give this phrase more meaning—we feel certain that no political system can be the answer to what has gone wrong.

Is there a particular reason why things *shouldn't* go wrong? By what mandate are they supposed to go right? Is there any better reason for things to go right than that, as a matter of course, we expect them to?

The idea of things going right has two levels of meaning. One is a small, limited meaning—just getting what we want on the basis of personal expectations. Desire looks for satisfaction, and so expects it. The other level has a deeper origin, related in physiological or organic terms to the rejection of pain and the will to live, and in terms of moral consciousness expressive of the insistence on justice. Justice is practically impossible to define, but we all know what it means. We all have a *sense* of justice, just as we all want freedom, want to be able to make choices. These feelings and ideas are as much a part of our subjective being as heart and lungs are part of our bodies. They are primary realities of human life. When justice and freedom prevail, things go right.

Now, as a matter of fact, there has been no systematic attempt to understand the frustrations of the human longing for justice and freedom since the time of the Buddha. We are not speaking of ideological solutions, but of universal explanations which have to do with man in the matrix of all nature, not man only in relation to "society." The ancient metaphysical system taught by the Buddha enabled the individual to regard all that came to him in the form of experience as in some way the fruit of his own past action—to know that his pain and feelings of confinement were bonds which could be loosened by the cheerful performance of duty, life after life. The teaching of the Buddha was a philosophy of reciprocal obligation, uniting and enclosing all forms of life—everything in the world—in which responsibility grew with capacity, with every relationship to be governed, finally, by the compassion of the Buddha-like qualities potential in all. This is the highest meaning of justice. Justice is alignment with the laws of life.

Whether or not this outlook is found acceptable, its reconciling effect should be evident. True, we do not have overwhelming existential evidence for "believing" in an ultimate or cosmic rule of justice—we have only our longing for it, which is probably better evidence than we suspect—but we may admit that pragmatically this way of meeting the experiences of life, pleasant and unpleasant, is likely to result in healthy-minded people. For whatever we believe, we start out with the same fundamental givens: we want things to go right, we want to experience justice and to be free. And what then shall we think about the scheme of life when things go wrong, when circumstances are "unfair," when the behavior of others reduces or even cancels our freedom? The response of those who believe they are mistreated by life is likely to be either rage or self-pity, depending upon individual character, and neither of these reactions has in it the promise of health.

Well, we have a number of reasons for expecting things to go right. There is balance and harmony in the natural world. The tenacity of life in nature is as impressive as death's universal presence. Every end is a beginning; every death a rebirth. There are manifest securities in the regularity of natural cycles. Tomorrow morning, the sun will be there. We live in a framework of reliable expectation, universal patterning, comprehensible design. There is also endless adaptation. A man who studies the life zones, from desert to mountain, from ocean depths to littoral swamps, has much encouragement to think that living things are meant to survive, and that there is meaning and fulfillment in the life-death-birth cycle. The Carmel cypress on Point Lobos have made a beautiful living out of cracks in rocks. There are no vacant spaces in the world, save in mathematical abstractions invented by humans. It is all taken up, used, "recycled," and with a style and splendor that has kept the poets and painters busy for thousands of years. Surely there is a "rightness" in all this; we feel it, though with far from complete understanding.

What would "adaptability" be for human beings? Our natural adaptability may have parallels in nature, but it can't be the same. We have our own feeling of symmetry—our sense of

justice—that you don't find in crystals, plants, or animals. The moral universe is not theirs, only ours; and the moral dimension is for us paramount. Look at the enormous variety of moral codes, while only a few ethical principles would be enough. In our oddly idiosyncratic ways we, too, are adaptable.

The world of human experience is a world of Christs and Buddhas, of Neros and Judases, of Andy Hardys, Archie Bunkers, and Caspar Milquetoasts—of Alexander and Napoleon, of Benedict Arnold and Good Soldier Schweik. It is the world of Romeo and Juliet and Bonnie and Clyde. Of Quakers and Nazis, of Jews and Arabs, of Stalins and Masaryks, of Lincolns and Nixons, of Pizarros and Ponce de Leons, of Zulus and Rough Riders—and GI Joes. Of Mata Haris and Simone Weils. Of Henry Thoreaus and John Muirs and oil spills and DDT. Of the Wright brothers and the Concorde, of the Assuan High Dam, the Eiffel Tower, and McDonald's Hamburger Stands. A world, in short, of greatness in both virtue and crime, and of gray mediocrity—and underneath it all continuous human longing.

An expression of that longing came recently in a letter:

> We live in an inhuman age, an age of violence against the life and spirit of what is human within us. Do those who act inhumanly recognize the inhumanity of their actions? If not, how can I communicate my judgment about their actions to them? . . . To live, and to live with a sense of rightfulness and commitment, I must make my assessment, but I need to make it in such a way that it is tentative, subject to review and modification. I may be completely wrong about you and about myself.
>
> To be myself, I need you. I need you to be human, I cannot be human alone. Yet, everywhere I turn, I experience the pressure to put my feelings and your feelings to one side: pressure to get on with the work, keep my feelings to myself, do what is expected of me . . . And you are subjected to the same pressures. . . .
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> Instead of relating to you, who are before me, I relate to an abstraction, society, or to some cause with which I identify. My concern is about my country, or my company, or my party or organization or group. I am even political about my church and my religious life. . . . I lose my sense of who I am, what I am. . . . I serve these forces outside myself and lose myself in the process.
>
> When I am human, I transform myself in the process of living. When I am political I try to transform you. I try to change the world. . . . So, as a political person, I am guarded, safe, pragmatic, external. I repress my self and deny your self. I am inhuman.
>
> Insofar as my behavior is survival-oriented, insofar as I do what I do just to keep alive, I cannot be human. I am enslaved, not free. . . .
>
> What can we do to be human? The question has a familiar ring, reminding us of a question put two thousand years ago. The answer then would also be the answer today—a renunciation of the enticements, the power and prerogatives that go with success in the world's activities. . . . In order to be "saved" today, I have to reject the forces that compel me to act inhumanly. And this means most of the forces that operate in the modern world. . . .
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> No one escapes inhumanity simply by virtue of the group to which he belongs. . . . All that can be hoped for is that small groups of men of good will and decent behavior will struggle to construct human milieux out of which human experience may emerge. The construction and continuous criticism and reform of milieux is all that we can expect and hope for in our time. . . . if I can find just one other person who aspires to support life with me, rather than suffocate and deny it, then the environment created by our friendship can shake the world as it shapes our world of experience. The strength of that friendship can even withstand the forces of evil. Just that one milieu constructed out of our relationship with each other is the beginning of the reform of the world. It is one step, and the only step we can take, away from the inhumanity which lies within us.
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> The task before each one of us who wants to be human is the task of discovery and construction: discovery of human aspirations in ourselves and others, and construction of human supports for those aspirations.

How do we know that the "universe" will respond to these high intentions?

Well, we don't, really. But out of the grain of our conscious lives come the longings these ideas articulate. They are part of our being, and we are part of the universe, so that, if what is most essentially a part of us is also part of the universe, these ideas are somehow *there.* This is an inference inescapable for conduct, however uncertain it may seem in conception or philosophy. We have a Great Divide to cross in philosophy, if we are ever to acquire a living faith in the rationality—the "morality"—of the world. But there is nothing to cross to make up our minds to this way of acting. There is nothing else, certainly nothing better, to do.

The ground for acting so is existential, experiential, and the calling is at least as old as the Stoic demand that we live according to the *best* that we know. Human nobility, human obligation, is not part of some "deal" with the cosmos; it placates no deity, buys no final bliss, accepts no bribes. But it would be stubborn negation of age-old intuitions to assert that a full-hearted response from nature and the world can never come. The charge is to act *as if* the world were a moral continuum. The relation is between man's *noblesse oblige* and a grace that may be a light from another sun.

There are various confirming testimonies to the outlook of the letter we have quoted, a recent one being the passage reprinted recently from Herbert Kohl's *Half the House:*

> It is difficult to live a healthy life in this culture, since we are all in complicity with its worst aspects. Paying taxes, using the freeways, buying more than we need, tolerating someone else's poverty, saving for our personal futures worrying exclusively about our own children—all are acts of complicity. This is true . . . for me in my home in the Berkeley Hills, and for people in communes, collectives, alternative institutions of any sort. The sustained and responsible attempt to change aspects of this culture leads us into inconsistencies, into supporting what we want to destroy in many subtle and unexpected ways. However, assuming responsibility for this complicity and for our own failures is the only way I know to develop sustained action that might eventually lead to a humane society. . . .

For another expression we turn once more to Arthur Morgan, who, years ago, wrote in *The Long Road:*

> There is scarcely any more effective means for bringing about social change than the "apostolic succession" that results from the intimate association of persons of clear purpose and great commitment with small groups of young people . . . for most of us the main drives of purpose and our fundamental ethical controls usually are carried over from youth. Thus the environment of childhood and youth actually determines the quality of the leadership of a few years later. . . .
>
> Keeping in mind all the dangers and difficulties involved, for many reasons it would be desirable for persons who are committed to actually achieving what I have called the universal expedients of a good social order, to begin to build their own social and economic world. If such men are to escape the constant dilution of their purposes by society at large, it is desirable that there be islands of brotherhood where men of like purposes can strengthen each other and can create a milieu in accordance with the universal expedients of a good life.

This, surely, is the sort of "work" to which people tired of the ways of the world can turn. The conceptions expressed by our correspondent, by Herbert Kohl, and by Arthur Morgan, go to the core of the dissatisfactions felt by so many with the man-made world of our time—and then, beyond, to a workable plan of action.

REVIEW
UNFINISHED REFORMATION?

THE pain of self-consciousness is the subject investigated by Robert Currie in *Genius* (Schocken, 1974, $10.00). He calls it "alienation"—a word of many meanings, perhaps because the experience of psychological pain changes with each conception of the self and the human situation. Mr. Currie defines alienation as the feeling "that *the self is divided from the self and that the self is divided from the world."* Escape from alienation, he suggests, is obtained through the restoration of unity. The author discusses genius as the high human capacity which seeks to understand and overcome alienation. Five writers are considered in this volume: E.T.A. Hoffman, Wyndham Lewis, Kierkegaard, Kafka, and Beckett. Their work is examined within a scheme of assumptions:

> For the particular purposes of this book I have interpreted Christianity as a *religions* understanding of alienation and its transcendence in a higher realm. Romanticism thus appears as a *secular* understanding of alienation and its transcendence, which retained most of Christianity's optimism about the possibility of a higher order. Modernism differs from romanticism, according to my definition, not so much in its basic categories as in the *pessimism* with which it understands these categories. A romantic posits a higher order which is, in general estimation, a better world, and which can be attained. A modernist doubts, almost to the point of disbelief, that the higher order can be attained; and he interprets the higher order in terms so ascetic, or even so objectionable, as to repel all but those who can rise to the austerity of creed.

Mr. Currie works with sweeping strokes on a broad canvas. The Church, he says, offered a rescue from alienation made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus, which could be obtained through the intercession of the priest. The Reformation rejected this salvation by priestly surrogate, declaring the priesthood of all believers:

> The reformation thus introduced the modern concept of democracy since, just as faith in the end equates man with God, in the end it equates all men with each other. And in this way, too, the reformation intensified men's sense of alienation. For its democratic tendencies emancipated the many from the controls of a world formerly at least *apparently* unitary, and fragmented society into separate, more or less free, individuals.
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> If the reformation thus rendered transcendence of alienation the more urgent, it also changed the concept of transcendental agency. Reformation theology taught that alienation was to be overcome, not through the routine of the church, but through human activity in history. As soon as the transcendental lay within the sphere of man's knowledge and belief, that man who knew most—and who brought most to the knowledge and belief of other men—could be identified as the secular, the historical transcendental personality: that is, he could be identified as genius.

This brief historical summary recalls Octavio Paz's account of the modern artist as inheriting the mantle of the priest—becoming the "spiritual hero." Art objects, he said, "were made idols," while "museums are our places of worship." The burden is of course too heavy for the artist to bear. The artist, especially the modern artist, seldom finds release from alienation, nor has he any consoling doctrine of escape. More than other men he is likely to know the reaches of existential pain, and if true to his calling will pretend to no "answers." He performs his inevitably imperfect creative acts, his partial restorations of wholeness, continuing the age-old wandering in the wilderness with only his private integrity of purpose to sustain him. Yeats gave a testament of the modern artist:

> Unlike the rhetoricians, who get a confident voice from remembering the crowd they have won or may win, we sing amid our uncertainty; and, smitten even in the presence of the most high beauty by the knowledge of our solitude, our rhythm shudders. I think, too, that no fine poet, no matter how disordered his life, has ever, even in his mere life, had pleasure for his end. . . . We must not make a false faith by hiding from our thoughts the causes of doubt. . . . Neither must we create, by hiding ugliness, a false beauty as our offering to the world. He can create the greatest imaginable beauty who has endured all imaginable pangs, for only when we have seen and

foreseen what we dread shall we be rewarded by that dazzling unforeseen wing-footed wanderer . . . The last knowledge has often come most quickly to turbulent men, and for a season brought new turbulence. When life puts away her conjuring tricks one by one, those that deceive us longest may well be the winecup and the sensual kiss, for our Chambers of Commerce and of Commons have not the divine architecture of the body, nor has their frenzy been ripened by the sun. The poet, because he may not stand within the sacred house but lives amid the whirlwinds that beset its threshold, may find his pardon.

Here, indeed, is an expression of the spontaneous asceticism of the artist, which makes his "religion"—a faith, rather, or fragile aspiration—an obscure credo to the common man. With an eye to what are called "social" issues, André Malraux spoke to this point:

> Talk of a modern art "of the masses" is mere wishful thinking: the expression of a desire to combine a taste for art with one for human brotherhood. An art acts on the masses only when it is at the service of *their* absolute and inseparable from it; when it creates Virgins, not just statues.
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> For a modern artist any genuine attempt to appeal to the masses would necessitate his "conversion," a change of absolute. Sacred art and religious art can exist only in a community, a social group swayed by the same belief, and if that group dies out or is dispersed, these arts are forced to undergo a metamorphosis. The only "community" available to the artist consists of those who more or less are of his own kind (their number nowadays is on the increase). . . . As for the art of today—does it not tend to bring men only to that scission of the consciousness, whence it took its rise?

Sensing these problems and judgments, Octavio Paz looks to a revival of handcrafts—which he thinks now well on the way—as a restoration of culture through the formation of community and community arts. The fine arts can hardly serve in this way—not before, that is, an almost total rebirth.

When, after the Reformation, each man became (in theory) his own priest, responsible for his own salvation, and when, as a result of this weakening of orthodox formula and belief, men were thrown back on their own resources, the private inspirations of the most talented men attracted attention. Without divine revelation, who now would be the guide? A millennium of belief in dogma is poor preparation for spiritual self-reliance. And the findings of the artists were widely diverse and not always intelligible to others. Doubts eventually grew stronger than hope, and the harsh nihilism of modern writers became the commonly insistent theme. One by one they stopped believing that there is anything like "transcendence" or escape from alienation. "It's dark out there, Jack," warned Kenneth Patchen. "The stations don't identify themselves." Mr. Currie writes:

> The epistemological crisis shapes modernist notions of the transcendence of alienation. Romantics understood transcendence above all as some cultural, intellectual or emotional act which would afford a new understanding of self and of world. Thus, according to Hegel, for example, evolutionary Geist was realizing itself in the human spirit, and human spirit would therefore eventually realise itself in this higher Principle, in relation to which it had existed hitherto only in a state of mutual estrangement.
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> Such epistemology is as profoundly optimistic as is all else that is truly romantic. Hegel's Marxist disciples retained this optimism; but Kierkegaard and all true modernists did not. . . .
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> Epistemological crisis is indeed central to modernism, as Kafka's work shows. Like Lewis, Kafka reinterpreted the antithesis of alienated and transcendental conditions as an antithesis of the realm of life—where men merely lived—and the realm of significance—where they knew their own existence. But that many endure only an unconscious life is for Kafka, as for Kierkegaard, simply a single phase of the epistemological crisis. For even the one either cannot, or is extremely unlikely to, enter the realm of significance; and although a man might gain the realm of significance, might know himself for what he is, here too he is beset by uncertainty.

Mr. Currie concludes that we must make our peace with alienation. The alienated and alienating things, he suggests, are part of our life and we should accept them, "'seriously and

critically, as the inescapable phenomena of a world permanently alienated."

But why should he leave it at that? Surely the artists, whatever their shudders, will return to the struggle after the present season of despair. There is something in human beings that will not accept merely pedestrian settlements which deny the reality of transcendental longing—a hungering after lost Nirvanas, someone has called it. An application of skeptical rationalism, based on the rarity of transcendence, cannot chain the soaring imagination.

What is modernism, at root? In its best aspect it is the rejection of established spiritual authority. In its worst, it is discouragement and hopelessness. Perhaps the delusion that truth, unity, restoration can be too easily bought—the price had been tithes or verbal assertions of allegiance—was unconsciously borrowed from traditional religion by the Romantics, so that their flighty efforts ended in existentialist despair.

There may be other hangovers from religious days which support the modernist feeling of failure. We bravely turned away from priestly promises, but did we reclaim the sense of inner potentiality which was lost by the worship of an external, carnalized Christ? Because the Reformation did not complete its work, sentimentality and an emasculating sense of finiteness may have infected its secular continuations.

We are still not instructed in the *meaning* of alienation. Why should a "reaching for the stars" so well sum up human hopes and dreams? What wide kinships have we neglected, making feelings of lost wholeness haunt our lives?

COMMENTARY
RECOURSE TO EMERSON

HOW do you keep things from getting bigger than human scale? Beyond a certain size, tools, organizations, institutions become unmanageable and in time control our lives.

The first thing to do is probably to recover from the delusion that bigness results from some inexorable law of nature—that we can do nothing but adapt to institutional necessities. The next thing, surely, is to stop dignifying the people who head big organizations and try to make them work. We take politicians and other "leaders" too seriously. We let them suppose that they can actually do something to improve the human condition. It is perfectly ridiculous for our best magazines to give so much space to the traits and doings of politicians. They are among the most helpless of human beings—utterly dependent upon public approval, which usually means the mediocrity of mass opinion. They are continually prevented from using their best intelligence.

Recovery of the human scale in both public and individual affairs actually depends almost entirely upon how we think about these matters. Changing our institutions will take time, of course, but plenty of individuals find means of relating to humanly scaled economics, social relations, and goals, simply by refusing to do anything else and by inventing ways of living their lives as they prefer. No one put this matter better than Emerson:

> Thus always we are daunted by appearances; not seeing that their whole value lies at bottom in the state of mind. It is really a thought that built this portentous war establishment, and a thought shall also melt it away. Every nation and every man instantly surround themselves with a material apparatus which exactly corresponds to their moral state, or their state of thought. Observe how every truth and every error, each a *thought* of some man's mind, clothes itself with societies, houses, cities, language, ceremonies, newspapers. Observe the ideas of the present day . . . how each of these abstractions has embodied itself in an imposing apparatus in the community; and how timber, brick, lime and stone have flown into convenient shape, obedient to the master idea reigning in the minds of many persons.
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> We surround ourselves always, according to our freedom and our ability, with true images of ourselves in things. . . . They only serve as an index to show where man is now; what a bad ungoverned temper he has; what an ugly neighbor he is, how his affections halt, how low his hope lies. . . . It follows of course that the least change in the man will change his circumstances.

We admit the truth in this statement easily enough. Putting it to work seems to be more difficult.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
MOSTLY COMPLAINT

A BOOK that came in for review recently, *Adapting Universities to a Technological Society* (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1974, $8.95), by Eric Ashby (master of Clare College, Cambridge), deals with education at a level we have little inclination to discuss. Isn't there a better light for changing education than the vulgar glare of the technological society?

Such big talk about *changing* education generates skepticism. Really changing education for the better would be about as difficult as accomplishing general social regeneration, an admittedly worthy end, but not something that has clear definition, like putting a man on the moon. Well, such books are going to be written anyway, and they may have some use in the gradual spread of critical ideas along with proposals of alternative ways of doing things. Meanwhile, the vast complexities of institutional change are shown in a passage by Lord Ashby arguing for the present-day importance of administrators of research and learning activities:

> Robert Boyle and Charles Darwin were able to do their work without having to secure the consent or even acquiescence of large numbers of people. When Boyle wanted to make a new piece of apparatus or Darwin wanted to build a new shed in his garden, their desires did not have to be set against the rival claims of other scientists for apparatus and buildings. There are still a few corners of science and scholarship which can be cultivated in this way, but the vast majority of people who want to do research or pursue learning now must join a unit of society organized for this purpose. Their wishes cannot be fulfilled without impinging on the wishes of others; they have to practice cooperation and on some decisions they must be willing to consent to authority. In a word, they must put up with administrators. When this change first came over science the problems of administration were simple: the groups were small and informal; the administrators were part-time amateurs, little more than spokesmen for their colleagues. In the University of Melbourne in Australia, for instance, there was no full-time university president until 1933. The professors ran the university in their spare time. Those easy days are over. British universities now spend about sixty million dollars a month and 90 per cent of this money comes from public funds. Expenditure in American universities is astronomically higher. Universities and research institutes would grind to a halt without professional administrators.

Lord Ashby is saying in effect that education must learn how to adapt to these conditions. No doubt university presidents feel an obligation to do so, and can be expected to try. But should they? What if the needed changes in education can come only by *rejecting* such conditions? What if the massive size of the apparatus of both education and scientific inquiry is already so far out of scale that application of improved administrative skills will only obscure for a while longer the follies of giantism?

Looking at the enormous "multiversities"—which have both vocational and nonvocational studies under one collection of roofs—Lord Ashby says he thinks separating the two endeavors would be "fruitless and futile." This locational blurring of the distinction between higher education and vocational training, it will be recalled, was a particular target of criticism by Robert M. Hutchins, years ago. Learning the skills of making a living, he maintained, is very different from the attempt to understand the meaning of life. But Lord Ashby apparently thinks that the multiversity is inevitable: "Universities have always mixed vocational and nonvocational studies, and polytechnics are already doing the same."

Interestingly, the combination of livelihood activities with humanistic studies seems completely natural in a simple society such as Gandhi envisaged as the expression of village culture. There children master the functions of the local economy and learn elementary intellectual skills while studying improved methods of meeting community needs. But in the so-called "advanced" societies, the point made by

Dr. Hutchins requires attention. Here economics has been institutionalized and its technical theory made into a pretentious "philosophy of life." This is corruption of the very idea of the higher learning. It isn't that there is anything intrinsically wrong with mixing practical activities with culture of the mind: the trouble comes from the way we *think* about these things. In a complex society, where both scholarly studies and technical disciplines have grown increasingly abstract, the very meaning of distinctively human development gets lost in the expertise. What, after all, has happened when the expression, "nonvocational education," is chosen to identify the Platonic quest for truth! How apologetic can you get?

Dr. Hutchins would probably say that it is educationally inexpedient to teach engineering or real estate management in the same place as history, literature, and philosophy, since students too easily lose sight of the different sorts of thinking involved, and the different motivations.

Other problems occur to Lord Ashby. The public, he thinks, will probably be glad to pay for practical vocational training, but what about "nonvocational" studies? "Why should the public pay for mass nonvocational education?" You might suppose this question to imply that the public couldn't care less about the level of culture and humanistic insight achieved through schools and colleges! But that is not quite what Lord Ashby means. So far as we can see, he finds that a bewildering confusion exists concerning the purposes of higher education. He says:

> The difficulty is that nonvocational education is pursued for a variety of motives. One motive which must be resisted is the pursuit of nonvocational higher education solely in order to get certification for a job. The employers must be reformed first in this regard. They are doing a great disservice to higher education by using degrees and diplomas, which are quite irrelevant for the jobs they are filling, as filters for selecting candidates. As more and more young people go to college, employers raise the educational standards they require, yet the educational credentials essential for getting a job often have little to do with how well an individual performs that job. I suggest that if nonvocational higher education is to serve its real purpose (which is to civilise people) it ought not to attract people who only want to be certified, not civilised. I can see only one way in which higher education systems can promote this, and it would be an unpopular way; *not* to certify nonvocational education but simply to do what was common in Scottish universities in the nineteenth century—issue class certificates to those who have attended the courses and done the required work.

This sounds as though Lord Ashby wants to devise some means to overcome the misconception and fraud which have resulted from mixing technical and higher education—not necessarily in the same plant or campus, but in people's minds. Well, it won't be easy, since not only the schools will have to agree, but also the personnel managers of industry, who delight in having "college graduates" in every job, not because college graduates know anything in particular, but because of the class identification. Hiring executives told Ivar Berg (see his *Great Training Robbery*) that they had little interest in what degree-holders studied in school—they just liked the degree as "a badge of the holder's stability." How, one wonders, does Lord Ashby plan to go about reforming the employers? Has he tried it yet, with any success?

In any event, he is quite clear on the purpose of higher education: "The primary aspiration which a good teacher has when he is teaching any nonvocational subject in higher education (history or German or linguistics or physics) is to carry the student from the uncritical acceptance of orthodoxy to creative dissent over the values and standards of society." We can all agree, here, but short of a staff composed of Socrates, Tolstoy, Blake, and Thoreau, how are you going to create the general atmosphere this goal requires, when the motives for keeping the place going are filtered through such foci of pressure as the Pentagon, the Congress, the local politicians, chambers of commerce, and the lobbyists of various partisan organizations? Would Socrates or Tolstoy or Blake or Thoreau let themselves be caught within twenty miles of such institutions?

FRONTIERS

The Roots of Restoration

A LEAD article of a few months ago (Sept. 25) quoted from Karl Polanyi—

> I plead for the restoration of that unity of motives which should inform man in his everyday activity as a producer, for the reabsorption of the economic system in society, for the creative adaptation of our ways of life to an industrial environment.
>
> It is like rebuilding a house, foundation, walls, fittings and all, while continuing to live in it.

Several of the papers MANAS exchanges with attempt to deal directly with this difficult sort of agricultural and economic self-reform. *Resurgence,* which comes from England, is one. Another is *People & Land* (345 Franklin St., San Francisco, Calif. 94102), a quarterly issued in behalf of the land reform movement.

A recently started paper is the *Maine Land Advocate* (Box 653, Bangor, Maine 04401), which spreads information about the land-trust idea and reports on the work and problems of land reformers. The obstacles are great, the general tendencies in the wrong direction—as is evident, for example, in the fact that in 1919 Maine had over 41,000 farms, 70 per cent of them unmortgaged, whereas today 80 per cent of Maine's land resources are owned by out-of-state interests.

The same thing is happening in other parts of the world. In *Resurgence* for September-October, Robert Waller quotes a recent FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) recommendation that agricultural development "should take as much account of the needs of rural employment and village life in general as of productivity and profit," a counsel which, he notes, "stands orthodox economics on its head." Orthodox economics caused what happened in Maine, and has also happened in East Anglia, where, year by year, the mechanization of agriculture is doing away with jobs on the land and impoverishing the local communities. Mr. Waller says:

> The increase of productivity by means of more machines and fewer men and the concentration of land in fewer and fewer hands, are producing such a critical situation both in the cities and the villages that it is no longer possible to say that productivity and profit must ultimately solve all problems. They are rather creating social chaos.
>
> I have never heard anyone say that farming in my own county of Norfolk should take as much account of the needs of village life and the proper balance of town and country as of productivity and profit. Yet the principle applies to all countries, not merely to the developing ones. It is a major principle of proper land use. Social obligation must impose order on economic development if any country is to have a balanced and healthy community.

Waller speaks of the "mesmeric effects of productivity and profit" on farmers, who have seldom been able to compete with industry in return on capital investment. Even so, the end of prosperity for even industrial farming is already in sight, by reason of the soaring price of petroleum on which large-scale agricultural operations are dependent. Another *Resurgence* contributor, John Seymour, notes that the "vast mechanized farms have become so hooked on a vast input of power, chemicals and fertilizers," that if oil really *does* become scarce the output from these farms will drop to nothing.

Meanwhile, the large farmers have adjusted to the use of artificial fertilizer and organized their operations around its use. Seymour says:

> Now the price of nitrogen has shot up to the sky and farmers are beginning to think again, but for many of them it is too late. They are hooked. If any one of the white-straw-crop monoculturalists in England tried to farm now with no artificial fertilizer he would be bankrupt in two years. His soil would produce next to nothing. The situation is extremely dangerous.

The soil would produce little because it is no longer good soil. The land has been turned into a passive vehicle for artificial food for the crops. Seymour continues:

> How can we repair the damage that has been done? By one way and one way only: getting people back on to the land. The High Farming of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in England, good peasant farming in those parts of the world where there is good peasant farming, was accomplished by *men and women.* The folding of sheep on light arable land . . . the yarding of cattle and carting out of the resulting farmyard manure, fuel-free horse cultivation row-crop cultivation to clean the land (i.e., kill the weeds without chemical herbicides): all these things took *labour.* The only way nowadays we are going to get men and women to labour on the land is to *give* them land, or allow them to buy it. Either in cooperative groups or as individuals the owner-cultivator must come back into his own. "Make a man the owner of an acre of desert and he will turn it into a garden—make a man tenant of an acre of garden and he will turn it into a desert," said Arthur Young, and never was a truer thing said.
>
> If we are to avoid catastrophe we must cut the land up into far, far smaller holdings. The Danes did it in the 1890s with the result that the average Danish holding is now under fifty acres and the Danes can knock the British farmer (with all his subsidies—the Danes are completely unsubsidized) out of the market with any product they like to send across here. Maybe the Danes don't drive Jaguars. So what?

Other articles in this issue of *Resurgence* include a long study by Michael Allaby on how Britain can feed itself, through long-term agricultural reform. There is also material on Vinoba's Gramdan movement, a report on the agricultural methods now practiced in China, and a number of other useful discussions. The September-October *Resurgence* is devoted to land use and its reform, but every issue of *Resurgence* has a page by E. F. Schumacher.

The *Maine Land Advocate* is the sort of paper you like to linger over—it has a grass roots quality. It prints articles about people living on the land, about agricultural communes in other countries, about natural foods and their preparation, and on renewable energy resources.

Incidentally, the editor of *Resurgence,* Kumar Satish, has written to say that copies of Vinoba's essay on Education, which was quoted in "Children" last May, is available in copies of an earlier issue of *Resurgence*—$1.00 postpaid. The address is 275 Kings Road, Kingston, Surrey, England. (A surface mail subscription to *Resurgence* is $7.00—airmail, $10.00.)