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WHAT "THINKING PEOPLE" THINK

TWO articles in the *Saturday Review* (May 31) supply the material for this week's discussion.

One, "The Intellectual in Videoland," by Douglas Cater, a communications expert, considers the uses and effects of television. The other examines the part played by local school boards in public education, and the public understanding of their role. Both articles are well constructed, combining factual background with intelligent interpretation. Both deal with vital areas of our common social life. Yet both are likely to leave the reader with vague feelings of dissatisfaction, of having learned things one ought to know but can't do anything about. From such reading, then, inaction becomes the habitual response, and guilt about doing nothing a subliminal mood. Yet the facts reported in these articles have obvious importance. While no one can really measure the influence of television on people's lives, it is bound to be great. And surely the question of "Who Runs the Schools?", which James Cass, the *SR* Education editor, writes about, concerns the welfare of all.

It isn't only that we feel helpless when confronted by such reports. The question of what should be done, supposing we could see a way to do it, is equally obscure. All that is plain is the fact of the confusion, the mess. These writers give a measure of objectivity concerning what is wrong, but, being intelligent, reject simplistic remedies. So the question becomes: What is the sensible response to such articles?

We now need some quotation from them. Mr. Cater discusses the incapacity of "thinking people" to cope with the impact of television. He wants to know why they don't take its abuses more seriously. This medium, he points out, "reaches greater masses than do all the other media combined (the number of sets in U.S. homes is nearly double the total daily circulation of newspapers)." He asks:

> Why haven't more of our talented scholars been attracted to the study of this new environment? . . . Why have our foundations provided very limited resources for the study of communications, which is as fundamental to society as education, health, and the physical environment?

Mr. Cater thinks there are three reasons for this neglect. One is that scholars are trained in logical analysis, while TV communication is mostly sensory and non-logical. Another is that television is controlled by commercial interests who would regard "better" programming which reduces advertising revenue as a species of insanity. "Thinking people do not know how to cope with a system whose economic laws, they are led to believe, are immutable." Finally, even careful studies of the influence of television produce no certainty. A three-year study conducted by the U.S. Surgeon General, costing $1.8 million, ended with a final report which supplied "only 'preliminary and tentative' evidence of a causal relationship between TV violence and aggression in children."

Short work is made by Mr. Cater of the "illusion that by using the medium we can create a Greek marketplace of direct democracy." Reflective and evaluative habits of mind tend to be shut out by "the totality and instantaneousness of television." Moreover, one study shows that "heavy TV viewers are more apt than light viewers to be turned off by politics." TV as a source of background for political decision is likely to make the viewer who relies on it "feel that he cannot understand or affect the political process." This may explain why, in an age of growing TV communication, there has been a "continuing decline in voter participation." Mr. Cater repeats the conclusion of a political scientist

that viewers uninterested in public affairs programs watch them passively, only because they are shown, and "are frequently confused and alienated by what they see."

Mr. Cater's article is a mixture of sagacious insights and devastating exposes of pompous optimism. He quotes past expectations for television from various enthusiasts of progress through improved technology, then says:

> Today, these visions are not so bright. Some critics now glumly predict that the new technology will suffer the fate of the supersonic transport. Others expect that the technology will be developed, but that it will serve strictly commercial, rather than social, purposes. Computer may be talking to computer by cable and satellite, but householders will still watch "I love Lucy" on their TV sets.

His conclusion is that we are nowhere near understanding the psychological predicaments and processes he has described:

> Our journalists, both on TV and in print, pledge fealty to the proposition that society thrives by communication of great gobs of unvarnished truth. Our law courts make us swear to tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Yet we only dimly understand how, in an all-enveloping environment, man chisels his little statues of perceived reality. As we approach a time when communication threatens to fission like the atom, we need to delve more deeply into these mysteries.

Well, whatever else Mr. Cater has accomplished or failed to accomplish, he has certainly explained why "thinking people" shy away from studying television at this level. You can't get a grip on the subject.

Needed are some sweeping Platonic generalizations to help us to feel justified in ignoring, not the subject, but the approach to it in Mr. Cater's report. Take Plato's criticism of the scientific theory of knowledge. Plato's objection to empirical method in science—not as the means to knowledge of nature but as the foundation of moral judgment—is that science investigates the world of continual "becoming," or change, and is therefore overwhelmed by more "data" than any investigator can handle, more fuzzy variables than he is able to control and generalize. So empiricism, unless it ruthlessly abstracts, can lead only to "opinion." In the case of the various aspects of television and its applications, all the complexities of human nature are relevantly added to the "natural" phenomena of what is studied. How, then, can any conclusion be "firm," and how could any decisions be based on the opinions so reached? Plato would say that the studies of television quoted by Mr. Cater are of the sort pursued by inhabitants of the Cave—they depend upon a poor and flickering light which gives vague shape to isolated behavioral silhouettes. (For a thorough development of this criticism see Robert Cushman's comparisons of the views of Plato, Aristotle, and Bacon on the idea of Knowledge, in *Therapeia*, Chapel Hill, 1958.) Plato would argue that the faculty of moral judgment has to be exercised throughout the investigation, not held in suspension until "all the facts are in." Actually, the "facts" are not facts, but unexamined opinions, and when such opinions are impressively organized as an array of presumed knowledge, they are practically impenetrable to moral intelligence.

So, presented with such conclusions, we feel impotent and frustrated, although, as perhaps a further irritation, somewhat "informed. "

In his article on the public schools, Mr. Cass shows that while school boards are chosen by local communities and are believed to "run the schools," in fulfillment of democratic principle, in fact school boards don't run the schools and the public is commonly ignorant of how educational policies are originated and carried out. The *SR* Education editor summarizes a recent Gallup survey:

> Only about one-third of the adult public know that school boards establish overall school policy but do not administer schools on a day-to-day basis. Only half the public know that there is a difference between the "school-board" and the "school administration," and about 25 per cent believe that the terms are synonymous.

> Although more than half of the public believe that the school board is one of several agencies responsible for "running the public school system," only 38 per cent are aware that members of school boards are representatives of the people.
>
> Only 42 per cent of the public believe that when disputes arise, the school board acts in the best interests of the students rather than the interests of the teacher unions, administrators, local pressure groups, and the like.

Mr. Cass remarks that this general ignorance of an institution meant to serve the people is not new, but adds that "the public schools have traditionally been closer than most agencies to the heart of community life." In recent years, however, there has been "progressive alienation of the public from its schools." One reason is the increase in size of schools and school districts. Another is the "professionalism" of teachers, who show lessening interest in cooperation with citizens. Meanwhile, the spread of commuting and the increase in working mothers has led to diminishing parental contact with the schools.

Along with this diagnosis, Mr. Cass suggests that the time has come for the schools to renew relations with the community and avail themselves of the "wealth of adult knowledge and skills" to be found there. He concludes:

> The concept of a two-way exchange between school and community is attractive in theory, but it will doubtless be difficult to work out in practice. Nevertheless, this is one way to start closing the growing distance between the public and its schools.

There is a clear difference between the problems described by Mr. Cass and those suggested by Mr. Cater. People can still find some direct access to helping or affecting the schools. The schools, however organized, are not completely institutionalized and bureaucratized. Individual and groups of parents are able to make themselves heard. They can and do bring about changes in what is done in the name of education.

Television presents far more difficult problems. Not only has it been institutionalized in behalf of conventional economic enterprise, but it also involves complex technological imperatives which give issues an artificial coloring.

Well, what can we *say* about this situation, even if we can't directly *do* anything about it?

(Why can't we do anything about it? Because television, in its way, involves the arts—the lively arts—and regulation of the arts by legislative and bureaucratic control is simply foolish, if not wrong; the best you can do is prohibit obvious evils, while the not-so-obvious ones will continue, and they may be worse than anything else. The boycott—turn it off—remains as a personal solution, and this, in the long run, may be the only one that works.)

We can say this, drawing on Richard Goodwin's analysis in *The American Condition:* A good society starts out by being a community. A community is a fellowship of humans whose mode of social life is expressive of commonly felt satisfactions and cooperatively served needs. When a community, for various reasons, transforms its conceptions of order into an ideology, and institutionalizes them, the needs are less and less commonly felt. Eventually, their fulfillment is externally and technically fulfilled by a bureaucracy. Some needs (or wants) are exaggerated, others are ignored and neglected. In our society, we have an acquisitive ideology, implemented by scientific technology and ordered by a market structure in which only the goods which can be converted into dollar values are admitted to be *real.* This market structure has no mechanism for responding to needs that have no equivalent economic value. The market structure is most responsive to mass economic demand, so the competition and therefore the opportunities for choice are at the level of vulgarized mass taste or vulnerability.

As for the conventional means of changing this situation, Mr. Goodwin points out that people—citizens, voters, and "consumers"—respond to institutionalized choices, as in elections, legislative propositions, etc., with only a portion of their being—a mere fragment of

themselves. They don't *feel related* to the issues presented in an election except exceptionally and occasionally. It isn't a community choice; it is an engineered, politicalized, and sometimes only a Hobson's choice, often highly abstracted and remote from people's everyday lives. And we must add that their everyday lives are not community lives, that their everyday decisions are mostly concerned with personal interests—seldom consciously social or from a community point of view.

There is a related contrast between the way the producers of entertainment measure television and the way reformers look at it. How does the purchaser of television time evaluate a program or a commercial? He wants to know whether and how quickly it will change a viewer's buying habits. He reads the studies the station supplies of the effect on buying habits of a thirty-second commercial—that's *all* he cares about—and the studies give him short and easy answers.

But as Mr. Cater points out, this way of evaluating television cannot possibly measure "the impact of the total phenomenon—the experience of the child who spends as many as six hours a day, year in and year out, before the set." *How do you measure the cumulative effect on the child.?* As Cater concludes: "This cumulative effect is what makes watching television different from reading books or going to the movies."

Obviously, we need a sort of criticism which will effectively run counter to the entire psychology of an acquisitive and marketing society. But how many people are likely to adopt, or even listen to, such a line of "extreme" condemnation of what has very nearly become the American way of life?

Mr. Cater's recommendation is this:

> Too much critical time has been wasted worrying about the worst of television. More attention should be paid to the best, not simply laudatory attention but a systematic examination of style and technique and message. Criticism should also extend its reach beyond the intellectual elite into elementary and secondary schools, where children can be stimulated to think about the medium that so dominates their waking hours. We must endeavor to raise the viewers' capacity to distinguish truth from sophistry. . . .

We may feel some agreement with these proposals, but will they have any noticeable effect? The "thinking people" Mr. Cater invites to this task are likely to say that it is necessary to find deeper roots of the problem than the ones he has described.

First, then, let us make a distinction. In an article in the *Humanist* (November/December, 1972), Lawrence Kohlberg said: "Moral psychology considers what moral development is. Moral philosophy considers what moral development ought to be." Most of the critical discussions we now encounter are almost entirely in terms of moral psychology. They tell us what *is*, but they reveal little of what ought to be, and still less of the prerequisites of what ought to be. The vague, indiscriminate mixture in discussion of what is with what ought to be, without dear recognition of the conditions necessary to change—especially necessary at the level of vast institutions such as the electronic media and the systems of public education—shows a grave lack of criticism of another sort. This is the criticism that Richard Goodwin provides in *The American Condition.* In a single passage early in this work he outlines the conditions of social change:

> Modern individualism, which had its inception in the rebellion against medieval order, has culminated in an ideology that equates liberty with the absence of all bonds, all commitments, all restraints on individual action. The ideology assumes recognizable form in the dissolution of the human connections traditionally sustained by social institutions such as family, community, common social purpose, and accepted moral authority. This reference to such dissolution is intended not to lament the past or to point out changing ways of life but to illuminate the progressive destruction of a necessary condition of freedom. Such institutions are the means by which individuals in society can join to create order and rule themselves. They are the alternative to that anarchy of desires which necessitates and

> nourishes an increasingly coercive social process, whose dominant structures are both the beneficiaries and the agents of fragmentation. We may, as many do, view these institutions of a common life as impediments to the free expression of the self, and struggle to escape their bonds. That struggle does not alter the fact that the liberty to pursue purely individual wishes is paid for by the relinquishment of control over social existence. The conviction that social wants are made up of private desires is itself an important aspect of the ideology that sustains oppression. The reduction of freedom to preference and opinion is a sign of advanced social fragmentation and decay. Through the exercise of private liberty, we are made to forfeit the possibility of association and intimacy which is the premise of individual power; that is, of an unalienated existence. Moreover, participation in a common life is more than a condition of freedom—more than an alternative to external coercion. Intimate association with others is itself an attribute of that humanity we wish to fulfill. . . . Detachment from others—from shared existence—is diminution of the self. . . . The individual who serves social goals is not alienated from one's own senses and thoughts. The will of the individual contains the social will, which is, then, an instrument of personal fulfillment rather than of social coercion.

Here, in rather abstract language, Mr. Goodwin struggles to express a conception of society in which moral philosophy will have the major role—a society in which what *ought to be* has the possibility of realization. A life chiefly responsive to the "anarchy of desires" produces patterns of behavior which project the contradictions in individual life to the social level. In a loosely organized rural society these contradictions are hardly noticeable, but with the coming of large urban populations and the development of bureaucratic forms to manage complex technological systems—all presided over by a virtually "religious" formulation of the ideology of impulse and self-satisfaction—both conflict and disorder become endemic. They manifest increasingly in institutional arrangements as well as in individual life. Interest groups armed with economic power, manipulative skills, and ideological slogans war with one another, often exhibiting the fanaticisms once limited to the contests of proselytizing religion.

In such a society there is little place for, or understanding of, the common good. The very grounds of moral philosophy have been occupied by highly organized processes of alienation. As a result, the hardly concealed impotence of the "thinkers" Mr. Cater appeals to has ample explanation.

It is necessary, in short, to go behind institutional façades and to work toward establishing the nuclear beginnings of community—for the creation of the conditions under which constructive change will become *possible*. These conditions are well described by Mr. Goodwin:

> The alienating consequences of the structure of demand demonstrate that only through association can human beings acquire and exercise power over their own social existence. Alienation includes loss of choice, and the power lost to human beings is inevitably absorbed by the ruling forces of social life. Values and codes of conduct are made consistent with the purposes of economic bureaucracy, thus becoming the purposes of the citizen. We value the goods that the bureaucracy produces, the highways it builds, the opportunities it affords. Even when we are apprehensive about such extensions of control—for example, the uses to which television is put, and the increasing autonomy of the military bureaucracy—we lack the internally shared principles of value and conduct which would provide a restraint and a source of collective opposition.

Thinking people are intuitively or rationally persuaded that the recovery of "internally shared principles of value and conduct" must come first.

REVIEW
FOR BUILDERS AND PLANNERS

FORM follows function, said Horatio Greenough over a hundred years ago, and while people sometimes argue about this principle it seems the most important thing you can say concerning practical design, or any sort of design. What comes of ignoring this principle is briefly put on the second page of *Your Engineered House* (Evans and Co., $4.95). The author, Rex Roberts, who says he is a carpenter, begins:

> The first modern architect was a man who looked at his family, his needs, his location, his available materials, his tools, his strength, his resources, then built accordingly. He lived a long while ago.
>
> No one has successfully applied a name to his architectural method. I hope no one ever does. Once a design has been named, the name becomes a style and takes precedence over thought. Having become a style, it stultifies the use of new technology to satisfy old desires. It transforms engineers into draftsmen, and honest carpenters into nail drivers. It inhibits our sense of place, our awareness of the weather even our knowledge of whether we are comfortable or not. Worst of all, it makes us pay for things we neither need nor want.
>
> The world is strewn with examples of misapplied style. If we like we can call these houses "non-engineered." The fact of non-engineering, that is, the absence of thoughtful appraisal even in such simple matters as location and orientation, is obvious at a glance.

Anyone planning a house, or thinking about planning a house, needs to read this book. It will almost certainly seduce the reader into numerous applications of common sense. Mr. Roberts knows how to apply common sense to every step of bringing a house or home into being. No doubt he has pet ideas and favorite ways of doing things, but following him in such matters is a very small tribute to pay for the general benefits he brings to the future home-owner. The book is a comprehensive check-list of all the elements that need consideration—including a number of things that are omitted by most check-lists. The drawings are simple and clear, the prose entertaining as well as explicit, and the coverage seems reasonably complete. It is a big book—8½" x 11", 237 pages, paperbound. Where to build, how and of what, when, where to save money and where not to, with extensive notes on heating, lighting, sound control, materials and finishes are the contents.

We can't possibly review this book—we don't know enough. But we enjoyed reading it through without the slightest intention of building anything. A neighbor who has practically finished a new home took a look at it and handed it back, remarking that he couldn't afford to read a book from which he would learn all the things he had overlooked or done wrong!

Something of its quality is conveyed by a passage on bricks as a building material, which begins by explaining why so many early American barns were red:

> It was an accident of history which gave great grandpaw his brick dust with which to paint the barn. The big operator of American colonial days was the shipowner who hauled grain to England and brought back manufactured goods. Since a thousand dollars worth of manufactured goods weighed less than a thousand dollars worth of grain, he looked around for something to ballast his ship on the return trip. Something more profitable than rocks.
>
> England had little wood but plenty of clay. Poor folks were building houses out of bricks, the only material they could afford. So bricks became the ballast of choice and the ships sailed home, full of bricks and calico. When the shipowner wanted to build a house, he used bricks. I would have done the same. When other folks saw that the richest man in town lived in a brick house, they wanted to live in brick houses too.
>
> The bricks became a symbol of wealth, stability, permanence. It got written into bedtime stories, with the third little pig laughing at the wolf from inside his house of bricks. Worse, the one-time humble brick got written into municipal codes as being desirable and in some cases compulsory.
>
> The symbolism of brick for the well-to-do persisted as brick walls became more expensive. High cost led to so-called brick veneer, a structural

> nightmare consisting of one layer of bricks against a wooden frame. Some folks built just one brick wall, that facing the street. Finally came the ultimate travesty—bricks printed on paper.
>
> There is delicious humor in all these events stemming from the historical accident of a shipowner's ballast. The joke is that for any structural purpose I ever heard of, brick is not one of the better building materials and never has been.

Well, if the English have little wood, the Egyptians have far less. And for the Egyptians there is only one feasible, low-cost, building material—mud bricks. Of course, Mr. Roberts wasn't thinking of Egypt when he spoke demeaningly of the brick. He was talking about Americans. For a celebration of the brick, and for much more, Hassan Fathy's *Architecture for the Poor* (University of Chicago Press, 1973, $10.95) is the book of books. It is sheer romance joined with eminent social intelligence from beginning to end. It should be on every best-seller list, and would be, in a society of people concerned about changing their ways into patterns productive of synergistic good for all.

As a young architect in the early 30s, Hassan Fathy was sent to design a school for a small country town on the river north of the Nile Delta. The poverty and filth of the town were so bad that he could hardly bear to walk its streets.

What to do? Good housing would be a beginning, but what can be built out of nothing with no money? Fathy was haunted by the hopelessness of the peasants and their abject acceptance of "the whole horrible situation." Tormented by his own helplessness, he resolved to do something.

> Yet what? The peasants were too sunk in their misery to initiate a change. They needed decent houses, but houses are expensive. In large towns capitalists are attracted by the returns from investment in housing, and public bodies—ministries, town councils, etc.—frequently provide extensive accommodation for the citizens, but neither capitalists nor the state seem willing to undertake the provision of peasant houses, which return no rent to the capitalists and too little glory for the politicians; both parties wash their hands of the matter and peasants continue to live in squalor. God helps those who help themselves, you might say, but these peasants could never do that. Hardly able to afford even roofs to thatch their huts, how could they hope to buy steel bars, timber, or concrete for good houses? How could they pay builders to put the houses up? No. Abandoned by God and man, they dragged out their short, diseased and ugly lives in the dirt and discomfort to which they had been born. Their state is shared by millions in Egypt, while over the whole of the earth there are, according to the U.N., 800,000,000 peasants—one-third of the population of the earth—now doomed to premature death because of their inadequate housing.

One might think that reading a book that starts out this way would be an agonizing ordeal, but you put it down filled with enthusiasm, and even a bit inspired. Fathy found his solution in learning how to build good mud brick houses to take the place of bad ones. He now believes that, for rich or poor, mud brick is the right building material in Egypt. The story of how he learned, and from whom, is fascinating.

There is plenty of mud in Egypt. The Nile has been laying it down during flood seasons since the beginning. Mud costs nothing—just the handling of it and moving around. You have to add—as the Bible notices—a little straw for cohesion and lightness, and then, if you know how, you can build a house that will stand for a thousand years. (There are ways of making doors and windows and their frames out of wood scrap.)

But what about the roofs? Mud brick walls cost little, but roofs require timber, and timber is expensive in Egypt. The ancient Egyptians built vaulted roofs out of mud brick, so Fathy decided to do the same, but his vaults collapsed when unsupported by wooden props while being erected. The poor couldn't even afford props. Finally, in a village near Aswan, he found some Nubian masons who knew how to make vaults without using props. This completed Fathy's requirements. With his crew of Nubian masons he began to build mud brick houses at very low cost—he did a studio cottage for an artist for

about $125, or fifty Egyptian pounds. He found he could put up fullsized dwellings with two large rooms, sleeping alcoves, built-in cupboards, a loggia and an enclosed courtyard, plus generous storage space, for $400. This was early in the 1940s.

A few years later Fathy got his chance to demonstrate what he knew how to do. On the site of the old Cemetery of ancient Thebes, watched over by the Colossi of Memnon, a squatter town of some seven thousand had grown up—inhabited by peasants who supported themselves almost exclusively by robbing the tombs and selling archæological treasures to dealers. Finally, the Department of Antiquities—which in Egypt has considerable clout—decided that the only thing to do was to move the entire settlement away from the tomb region, and the director of the Department, having heard of Fathy's low-cost houses, hired him to build the new town. They didn't give him much money, but he didn't need much—the figures—the completely amazing figures—are all in the book. It took three years to build the town, and pictures of the homes and public structures show what was accomplished by this combination of modern knowledge and ancient craft. Fathy went at the project more or less as Arthur Morgan went at TVA—thinking about the good of the people, how they could make a living now that they couldn't rob tombs. And, like Arthur Morgan, Fathy was not permitted by the bureaucratic powers-that-be (the same the whole world over) to finish the town. But he now is working on another project, cooperatively instead of officially supported, and he has written this magnificent book. It will hardly be possible for us to stop telling more about its contents, from week to week.

COMMENTARY
"NO SUBSTITUTE FOR PHILOSOPHY"

A NEW book by Gardner Murphy, *Outgrowing Self-Deception*, has this paragraph:

> In our quest for truth, we may have discovered a world of mounting uncertainties which, bedeviling us and magnifying our wishes and fears, made us feel ensnared. Perhaps we gradually discovered that habits, desires, fears and cultural standards do not control our perceptions completely, but that we adjust everything to our own picture of reality. Perhaps . . . we ought to investigate the "anatomy of judgment" if we are to reach a high level of faith in our capacity to understand.

We do indeed "adjust everything to our own picture of reality," and this recognition seems the keynote of modern self-awareness. What we are far from sure of, have not thought much about, and are only now beginning to question, is how we put this "picture of reality" together. As Douglass Cater remarks (see page 1): "we only dimly understand how, in an all developing environment, man chisels his little statues of perceived reality."

What part do individuals play in deciding how they think about themselves and the world? Is there a built-in goal of psycho-moral evolution, or can "anything" happen? Is pain a sign of progress ("growing pains"), or does it signify thrusts in the wrong direction? How much does "feeling good" count as an indication of well-being?

Along with the "growth centers" springing up all over, these questions are arising. A perceptive reviewer, Robert Kirsch (in the *Los Angeles Times* for Aug. 21)—commenting on Dr. Murphy's suggestion that "the process of self-emancipation, once it begins, is highly gratifying"—asks if "gratification" is good evidence. Moreover—

> The persistent certainties which have been offered in the name of scientific authority may be as great a deception as we have to face. The notion that progress and perfectibility are, if not inevitable, at least reachable is a tenet of modern dogma which itself should be the subject of critical examination. In other words, psychology, though immensely important, is no substitute for philosophy.

Well, how do you tell if you are on the right track? Are gaining knowledge, or just another set of illusions? Feeling "happy," but only because of what you have been able to shut out for a while? Man may be the measure of the world, as Dr. Murphy seems to suggest, but what is the measure of a man—of, that is, a wise or growing human?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
SOME LITERARY ANALYSIS

IN 1920 Carl Van Doren, as an editor or consultant for Harcourt, Brace, invited Carl Becker to do a book on the Declaration of Independence as "a work of literature." The study, Van Doren said, should note the "ideas and emotions it summed up and released" and examine how its doctrines were received by various sections of the public. Becker was an excellent choice for this assignment. Not only was he a skillful writer, but he had "an abiding interest in why people think as they do." All his life he tried to understand "intelligence at work."

Becker wrote the book, *The Declaration of Independence*, with chapters on the sources, drafting, and philosophy of the document, and it was well received. About twenty years later, in 1941, Alfred Knopf decided to restore the book to print, and Becker agreed, contributing a long introduction in which he defended his inclusion in the original edition of a chapter on "The Literary Qualities of the Declaration," to which James Truslow Adams had objected in a review. Replying, Becker said:

> The Declaration is after all a literary as well as a political classic. But apart from that, if it be said that politics has nothing to do with literature, or that the form of a document can be appreciated without reference to its content, I do not agree. On the contrary, it is a favorite notion of mine that in literary discourse form and content are two aspects of the same thing; and I do not know of any document more apt to support this contention than the Declaration of Independence.

Jefferson, Becker tells us, was chosen by his colleagues to write the Declaration because of his "masterly pen." He had, John Adams said, "peculiar felicity of expression." He was no orator and rarely if ever made a speech. Yet he was an excellent conversationalist and wrote with ease and rapidity. He edited his own work, and Becker shows that the changes he made in the Rough Draft of the Declaration were great improvements. The document has two main parts, one, a statement of the philosophy of democratic politics, founded on the "natural rights" of man, the second, an account of how the British king had violated those rights, making it necessary for the colonies to free themselves from his rule. The Declaration, Becker points out, was more than a declaration of Independence: it was the justification before mankind of the act of emancipation.

The felicity of Jefferson's prose is evident throughout the Declaration, and Becker gives various examples. However—

> There are some sentences in the Declaration which are more than felicitous. The closing sentence, for example, is perfection itself. Congress amended the sentence by including the phrase, "with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence." It may be that Providence always welcomes the responsibilities thrust upon it in times of war and revolution, but personally, I like the sentence better as Jefferson wrote it. "And for the support of this Declaration we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor." It is true (assuming that men value life more than property, which is doubtful) that the statement violates the rhetorical rule of climax; but it was a sure sense that made Jefferson place "lives" first and "fortunes" second. How much weaker if he had written "our fortunes, our lives, and our sacred honor"! Or suppose him to have used the word "property" instead of "fortunes"! Or suppose him to have omitted "sacred"! Consider the effect of omitting any of the words, such as the last two "ours"—"our lives, fortunes, and sacred honor." No, the sentence can hardly be improved.

This is a fine example of what word-order and rhythm can do for the strength and persuasiveness of a sentence. Much subtlety is involved, and illustrations make the only useful instruction.

Becker also locates some weaknesses in Jefferson's prose. He has already pointed out that the Declaration was the work of history-makers rather than historians. The indictment of the English king was a polemic which ignored the role of parliament—indeed, the Declaration does not

even mention the Parliament—seeking to establish a clear and simple case against the monarch as the personification of unjust policies and tyrannical intentions. Jefferson's rhetoric is unembellished and strong, but when he came to the passage on the slave trade—which for obvious reasons Congress omitted altogether—its quality faltered. Jefferson, although himself a slave-owner, cherished this passage, despite the weakness of the claim that George III was personally responsible for perpetuation of the traffic in Africans. Adams admired it, and Jefferson apparently worked hard to give it strength while ignoring the fact that without slave-*owning* there would have been no slave trade. This is the part of the Declaration, Becker says, "in which Jefferson conspicuously failed to achieve literary excellence." Discussing it, Becker remarks:

> Well, the passage is clear, precise, carefully balanced. It employs the most tremendous words—"murder," "piratical warfare," "prostituted," "miserable death." But in spite of every effort, the passage somehow leaves us cold; it remains, like all of Jefferson's writing, calm and quiescent; it lacks warmth; it fails to lift us out of our equanimity. There is in it even (something rare indeed in Jefferson's writings) a sense of labored effort, of deliberate striving for an effect that does not come.

Part of the trouble, Becker suggests, is in the general language used. Jefferson does not make us see black human beings "gasping for breath in the foul hold of a transport ship, or driven with whips like cattle to labor in a fetid swamp." Instead he speaks of the "violation" of the sacred rights of human nature. "The thin vision of things in the abstract," Becker comments, "rarely reaches the sympathies." Then he says:

> Yet the real reason lies deeper. It is of course quite possible to invest a general statement with an emotional quality. Consider the famous passage from Lincoln's second Inaugural:
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> "Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn by the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'the judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether'."

Comparing Jefferson on the slave trade with Lincoln on slavery, Becker says:

> Making every allowance for difference in subject and in occasion, these passages differ as light from darkness. There is a quality of deep feeling [in the second Inaugural], an indefinable something which is profoundly moving, and this something, which informs and enriches much of Lincoln's writing, is rarely, almost never present in the writing of Jefferson.
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> This something, which Jefferson lacked but which Lincoln possessed in full measure, may perhaps for want of a better term be called a profoundly emotional apprehension of experience. One might say that Jefferson felt with the mind as some people think with the heart. He had enthusiasm but it was enthusiasm engendered by an irrepressible intellectual curiosity. He was ardent, but his ardors were cool giving forth light without heat. One never feels with Jefferson, as one does with Washington, that his restraint is the effect of a powerful will persistently holding down a profoundly passionate nature. One has every confidence that Jefferson will never lose control of himself, will never give way to purifying rage, relieving his overwrought feelings by a burst of divine swearing. All his ideas and sentiments seem of easy birth, flowing felicitously from an alert and expeditious brain rather than slowly and painfully welling up from the obscure depths of his nature.

Well, if on occasion Jefferson was more than felicitous, there are many places in this chapter when Becker is more than "literary." We owe him much for this comparison of Jefferson and Lincoln—not that the conclusion is exactly acceptable, but because this sort of reading is an art of little practice these days. We need to ask ourselves: How is it that some humans are capable of "a profoundly emotional apprehension of experience"? What may be the way to deepen this capacity in us all? Carl Becker teaches his readers to ask these questions, no matter what he is writing about, for the reason that his primary concern was with "why people think as they do."

FRONTIERS

The Field of Understanding

IN *Growth and Its Implications for the Future* (Dinosaur Press, $3.95), Elizabeth and David Gray and William F. Martin examine the major facts and issues of present economic life. They project our production and consumption patterns into the future, and consider the alternatives which may be available to organized societies. The most respected authorities are effectively sampled, and the book is sprinkled throughout with well formulated questions. Most often quoted are writers such as Howard Odum, Barry Commoner, Garrett Hardin, and Daniel Bell. The book has two parts: I—Parameters of Growth, which indicates the rate of exhaustion and pollution, and II—Adjustment Mechanisms, which reviews what a number of experts think we may be able to do to avoid disaster.

In the concluding chapter, the writers say:

> The tremendous weight of inertia in the movement of human systems makes it very easy and natural to continue on as we are. The problem with business-as-usual is that it may lead us to some places and ways of life we would not choose if we were given a conscious choice. . . .
>
> The thesis underlying many of these studies is that in order to survive humankind is going to have to revise our present way of life. Jonas Salk has written:
>
> "In a sense, Man is like the Frankenstein monster. He has been produced by the process of evolution itself, to which he now contributes actively. Constructed for fitness to survive under previously prevailing circumstances, he must now accommodate to new conditions of life that are radically different quantitatively and qualitatively, for which he is, in part, responsible. Through the evolutionary processes that have produced him, Man and Nature are now, in effect, the joint authors of the human predicament."

The writers conclude: "For developing wisdom to survive, it is crucial to ponder thoughtfully and imaginatively the choices before us, and to try to think ourselves into 'alternative futures'."

This, of course, is plain common sense, and the authors underline it by titling their last chapter: "Choices . . . It's in Your Hands."

Well, abstractly, morally, and doubtless "actually," the choices are in our hands, but if you read this book through, remembering how difficult it is to get a single state, or a city, or even a small town, not just to do the right thing, but to know and agree on what the right thing is, you begin to wonder in what effective sense the choices are "ours." The book emphasizes "the tremendous weight of inertia in the movement of human systems" and ends by advocating *wisdom.*

What *is* wisdom, in the circumstances defined here?

The first step, manifestly, is to get people to *see* how we must revise our way of life. That's why the authors wrote this book. The material in it was originally prepared for some Congressional hearings, on the theory, no doubt, that only the government is big enough and powerful enough to start things moving in the right direction. After all, the analysis and criticism in this book is "total"—that is, it deals with *world* economic processes, world population, world food supply. It is logical, we suppose, to assume that because we have a total problem there can be only a total solution.

But government, like business, is an ad hoc enterprise. The authors of *Growth* consider this question:

> The man-in-the-street assumes that "someone" is thinking about our system's future in the same way he is thinking about his own and his family's future. He does not realize that for business planning "intermediate term" means the next year to 18 months, while long-term means usually five years or at most eight years ahead. The time frame is largely determined by the length of time presidents of companies are in that office. This usually is no longer than five to eight years, and as a man nears the end of his term, the time frame for responsibility shortens.
>
> Similarly the time frame for government is conditioned by tenure in office or the time until the

> next election. The longer term is viewed only as a series of these shorter terms, and it is difficult to think constructively about the long term, when one must be preoccupied by successive efforts to win short term elections.

It seems evident that the motives government as an institution is capable of embodying are just not good enough. The expedient measure, the prudent counsel, the hardheaded economic calculation won't work for the changes that are required. A different sort of inspiration, a new way of looking at life, the earth and ourselves is required. At root our relations with the earth, with nature, with all living things must be *ethical*, as Aldo Leopold said. We may need the reasons given by the specialists, the researchers, and the writers of books like this one on growth, but it is the feeling we have about the meaning of our lives that maintains the focus of sound reasoning, and at the same time channels the coordinating intuition of what to do first, how to act, and where to place one's best energies.

Some hint of a general movement in this direction is given by the authors of *Growth* in a quotation from a forthcoming book by George Cabot Lodge:

> The great individualistic, proprietary, competitive thrust with its enormous technological and economic achievements is faltering; the Lockean blip is ending. We are seeking new social and political constructions which will clearly embrace economic and technological activity and allow for the development of a new sense of community; the atomistic is giving way to the organic, the parts to the whole, the linear to the circular, the sensate to the ideational.

Also quoted is Jonas Salk, who says: "A large part of the difficulty of the human condition is due to the dissociation between intellect and intuition, a division that has been greatly exaggerated as knowledge has increased and earlier beliefs have been brought into question."

Well, if restoration of the intuition is what is needed, then we might consider the possibility that the intuition comes into play only through individual resolve and individual action, which together make a *field* for rational understanding. The problems covered by the term "growth" may be planetary in dimension, but the leverage for solving them lies in the initially independent thought and feeling and action of individuals.