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THE AREA OF HUMAN COMPETENCE

OUR title derives indirectly from a letter which came from a medical doctor who objected to our praise (in MANAS, Feb. 13) 0f what seemed to the reviewer an excellent book on diet and health. This book, *Food Is Your Best Medicine,* by Henry G. Bieler, M.D., was described in glowing terms, first, on general principles, since the author made it plain that health is fundamentally the responsibility and achievement of the patient, who may indeed require the guidance of a doctor, but who must learn to make himself well. Then, a minor reason for speaking highly of this book was the reviewer's personal knowledge of at least two instances of recovery by this means from a comparatively serious ill—an ill commonly treated with drugs which achieve little more than symptom reduction or control, in contrast with Bieler's method, which relies on dietary reform in behalf of regeneration of the organs affected. Before the review was published, the MANAS editors consulted with a reputable internist engaged in medical education. He said that Dr. Bieler had a record of attentive responsibility in relation to his patients (he is now retired), but added that his book in some ways went beyond the limits of established medical knowledge. This latter comment was also the charge of our critic.

We published the review in recognition of the value of the book's main thrust, and for what seemed its determined common sense. We probably should have included the "warning" made by the local physician, but at the time doing this seemed gratuitous. It is notorious that few doctors interest themselves in nutrition. The ones who, like Dr. Bieler, devote themselves to research in this field commonly experience more or less what he experienced. After curing himself of several serious disorders through diet, he "stopped using medicines entirely" because he "obtained better results through the chemistry of food and the chemistry of the glands—a more lasting effect and one less detrimental in the long run." Naturally, he talked about what he was doing with other doctors:

> They consider me a renegade from the established practice of dosing patients with medicines; they expected me to jump back on their bandwagon if I wanted to cure patients. Really, there is no special medicine which is a specific (or remedy) for any *chronic* disease. Even the miracle drugs, shamefully over-advertised, cannot perform this miracle. *For the truth is that 80 to 85 per cent of all types of human ailments are self-limited, that is, they run their course and the individual recovers.*

Dr. Bieler's experience was no novelty. Other eminent men who became nutritionists were favored with the same treatment, as their books testify. Medicine has long been indifferent to nutrition as a science. Back in 1954, when we took note of Dr. Benjamin Sandler's rather impressive account (in *Diet Prevents Polio*) of how he had been successful, as a public health official in a southern town, in controlling a polio epidemic with stringent diet reform—using newspaper publicity and radio as the means of gaining cooperation from the people in the area—a reader sent us copies of a series of editorials in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (April 26-May 17, 1947) which disclosed the fact that nutrition was not then taught as a separate subject in medical schools. The *AMA Journal* deplored this neglect and observed:

> Most physicians are now well aware of the importance of nutrition and believe it should be given greater attention in the teaching of medicine. Since the curriculum is full, however, the proposal does not demand establishment of a new division or the segregation of nutrition in a single department. . . . The problem, as the Council ton Foods and Nutrition] sees it, is to induce teachers of medicine to weave a heavier design of this relatively new subject into the already tight fabric of daily teaching.

We could of course mine nutritionist journals and other literature in this field to assemble a collection of polemical statements indicting the profession as a whole for consistent neglect of this crucial aspect of bodily health, but seeming to win such an argument is not to the point. Any publication can march to victory by picking its material; the real problem, here, is appropriate delineation of areas of controversy and progress, in the hope of showing what are apparently the inevitable stages of a major step of progress in human knowledge.

The first thing to notice is the frequency with which embattled pioneers who strive against the dead weight of an opposing orthodoxy are driven to extremes. The staid and complacent medical profession drove poor Semmelweiss *mad* because he wanted the proud establishment doctors in Vienna simply to *wash their hands* before delivering babies. They were in the habit of coming to the delivery ward straight from the dissecting rooms, their hands covered with the filth picked up from cadavers, and, in those days—not much more than a century ago—the rule of cleanliness was applied only to midwives. *Their* ward, incidentally, had a much lower mortality rate among mothers than that of the doctors', and this gave Semmelweiss the first clue to his great and beneficent discovery. But Semmelweiss died insane; the establishment of his day "knew better"; he was not "scientific," but, unhappily for him, only a Hungarian Jew who kept intruding his new-fangled ideas on pompous men who had practiced medicine all their lives.

There is no point in adding to such evidence. The general pattern is well established in psychological studies and appears with dramatic clarity in Thomas S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* From the viewpoint of the individuals involved, the crown of the innovator is a crown of thorns. Bruno was burned for espousing the heliocentric system and certain Pythagorean "heresies"; Galileo was condemned to years of house arrest by the Inquisition for similar reasons; Paracelsus was murdered by his enemies; Daguerre was declared insane by a medical celebrity two months before he became "the father of photography"; and Mesmer was rejected and mocked by the French Academy.

What can be said in behalf of the "academy" or orthodox opinion? There is much that ought to be said. First, in a science or profession where there is the tradition of integrity and devotion to impartial truth, the history of its development is continually being rewritten by responsible academicians. Paracelsus, for example, is today regarded with more understanding eyes. The new biographies of Paracelsus see in him a man of both courage and genius. He was, you could say, one who "went to extremes" in order to get attention for his revolutionary ideas. He would burn the books of Galen in the town market place for a start in his public relations! Common attitudes toward him are well illustrated by the fact that his middle name, Bombastus, was believed the origin of "bombast." He was the original bombastic man! But we cannot therefore endorse all bombasts, or list all the persecuted and ignored as selfless and unappreciated servants of the human race. All that we are attempting, here, is to show the confusing circumstances of the way in which, collectively, we try to separate wisdom from folly, good practice from bad, crackpot theories from daring originality, useful public counsel from unsupported speculations that may be harmful to follow or accept.

In making such an argument, of course, it is necessary to choose as champions of useful innovation those who were subsequently vindicated. For some, even today, Paracelsus and Mesmer will be regarded askance because of the "occult" side of their opinions; and Béchamp's contemporary opposition to Pasteur's simplistic contentions in the germ theory of disease (Béchamp was an M.D., Pasteur a chemist) is still very much ignored (Dr. Beiler, incidentally, mentions him with respect). It can nonetheless be maintained that the tribunal of established

scientific opinion is necessary for both the protection of the lay public and for orderly progress. As Michael Polanyi says in *Science, Faith and Society* (University of Chicago Press, 1964):

> Suppose now for a moment that no limitations of value were imposed on the publication of scientific contributions in journals. The selection—which is indispensable in view of limited space—would then have to be done by some neutral method—say drawing lots. Immediately the journals would be flooded with rubbish and valuable work would be crowded out and banished to obscurity. Cranks are always abounding who will send in spates of nonsense. Immature, confused, fantastic, or else plodding, pedestrian, irrelevant material would be pouring in. Swindlers and bunglers combining all variants of deception and self-deception would seek publicity. Buried among so much that is specious or slipshod, the few remaining valuable publications could hardly have a chance of being recognized. The swift and reliable contacts by which scientists today keep each other informed would be broken, they would be isolated and their mutual reliance and cooperation paralyzed.

In another place in this small volume, Polanyi describes the "ideal" scientific establishment's functioning:

> Novices to the scientific profession are trained to share the ground on which their masters stand and to claim this ground for establishing their independence on it. The imitation of their masters teaches them to insist on their own originality, which may oppose part of the current teachings of science. It is inherent in the nature of scientific authority that in transmitting itself to a new generation it should invite opposition to itself and assimilate this opposition in a reinterpretation of the scientific tradition. . . . scientific authority ascribes the highest merit to originality, which may dissent to some extent from the established teachings of science. This internal tension and its dangers are inevitable.
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> The authority of science resides in scientific opinion. Science exists as a body of wide-ranging authoritative knowledge only so long as the consensus of scientists continues. It lives and grows only so long as this consensus can resolve the perpetual tension between discipline and originality. Every succeeding generation is sovereign in reinterpreting the tradition of science. With it rests the fatal responsibility of the self-renewal of scientific convictions and methods.

This, as we said, is an ideal account of the mode of scientific progress. In concrete practice, the ideal model is seldom faithfully followed. (For appalling evidence of this, see David Lindsay Watson's *Scientists Are Human* [London: Watts, 1938.] Other factors such as political ideologies, self-interest, common egotism, and the "party" spirit play a part. One thinks of the Stalin-dominated Soviet Academy which destroyed the Russian geneticist, Vavilov, in behalf of the Lamarckian Lysenko—a struggle which ended in Vavilov's imprisonment and death. One thinks of the legal prosecution of chiropractors in this country, to the point of driving them from practice in some states; while, at the same time, in post-war Germany, American chiropractors were being invited to teach on the faculties of German medical schools. It may be noted that German medicine has never been singled out as having a weakness for quackery, and also that Germany has never had an organization of doctors comparable to the AMA. The practice of acupuncture is an interesting illustration of the unpredictability of such developments. Back in 1962, Dr. Wilder Penfield, a distinguished neurological surgeon, visited the medical schools of Communist China (as a Canadian, he was welcome there), returning home filled with admiration for the quality of scientific medicine taught by the Chinese faculties. There was no prejudice among these Western-trained doctors toward traditional Chinese medicine. In fact, herbalists and practitioners of acupuncture were invited into the hospitals to demonstrate their acts. Commenting, Dr. Penfield said:

> If the procedure has no value, a clear statement will then carry weight among medical men, ancient and modern. The so-called traditional doctors are physicians of an ancient school. They are not witch doctors nor are they charlatans. They have textbooks and records of experience. They do not operate, unless penetrating the skin with a needle may be called that. They do administer herbs. They counsel

> and reassure, and they are remarkably skilled in the treatment of . fractures. (*Science* Sept. 20, 1963.)

What, one wonders, would have been done to an acupuncturist in this country, if there had not been all the "miracle cure" stories in the newspapers, the blooming romance of political "friendship" generated by Dr. Kissinger's diplomacy, and the rather remarkable and rapid spread of interest in this sort of treatment shown by so many of the lay public? Is, after all, acupuncture "scientific"? Has its somewhat mystical theory any supporting ground in Western experimental science? Whatever the answer to this question, accomplished Chinese practitioners of acupuncture are now giving courses in their art in American universities. The acceptance of what they do may be justified in terms of "empirical" results—cures are pointed to—but "empiric" has for some time been more of an epithet than a mark of approval when it comes to scientific medicine. Meanwhile the vitamin manufacturers are gravely threatened by the FDA (Linus Pauling may be safely ignored; Nobel prize-winner or not, his faddism is "dangerous"); health food stores are raided for vaguely intimating that eating honey may be good for your health; and university-connected physicians and alleged nutritionists collect large consultant fees for public endorsement of "reinforced" white flour and white sugar as sound dietary ingredients.

In any event, the purity, though not the principle, of the scientific establishment, is certainly open to question. The principle stands as Polanyi has defined it; if the practice were as he defined it, we would all be in better shape; but we can no more discard the principle because of a failure to apply it conscientiously than we can give up democratic self-government because of the serious flaws in its practice.

What, then, is the area of competence of the ordinary man who is, for the purposes of this discussion, no kind of specialist? Our title, we said, derived indirectly from the letter from a physician who disapproved what we said about Dr. Bieler's book. At first we were going to call this discussion "The Competence of the Layman," but since *everyone* is a layman in some respect, the broader question of ordinary human competence seemed a better one to consider. The problems and vulnerabilities of the ordinary person in relation to professional expertise are outlined by Polanyi:

> The principal spheres of culture usually appeal as a whole to the public which as a rule accepts or rejects the opinions "of science" or the teachings "of religion" in their entirety without trying to discriminate between the views of different scientists or of different theologians. Yet occasionally they will intervene even in the internal question of one or the other great domain of the mind, particularly where an altogether new point of view is in rebellion against the ruling orthodoxy. Cultural rebels usually stand with one foot outside a recognized sphere, trying to get a hold in it with the other. Some parts of the public will come to their aid, others decry their efforts. The rise in our own time of psychoanalysis, manipulative surgery, and most recently of telepathy, owe much to popular support. On the other hand, popular intervention, for example, of nationalist French circles demanding recognition for the Glozel finds, or of German anti-Semitic students opposing Einstein's theory of relativity, was wrong. Generally speaking, intervention by the general public when made in a sincere search for the truth will be considered as rightful in a liberal society, provided it is kept within limits so as not to impair the sphere of autonomous government accorded to the experts under the protection of the community as a whole.

We have supported continuing respect for the ideal of "establishment" science, for the reasons given by Polanyi, but a similar respect must then be accorded the ideal "layman," to whom it falls to exercise his own commitment to truth, and especially when establishment practice gives serious offense, as it does from time to time. There are cases, in other words, when *rank* must not count, when hierarchy confers no authority, and when preserving the integrity of individual judgment, right or wrong, experts to the contrary, becomes the highest value. Admittedly, when the individual goes counter to established medical or other professional opinion, he, so to speak, takes

his life into his own hands. This is a large responsibility and only persons used to accepting responsibility should risk it. But he has this right as a man, and he may be right to use it; and he may make some decisions which, some day, will be vindicated scientifically, since science is by definition subject to change. The area of human competence, then, has to do with determining, as well as we can, which decisions it is right and sensible to delegate to experts, and which each one should make for himself.

If, for example, a person is alert in mind, he will have noticed that Western civilization has lately been characterized by a gradual reduction of the area of individual responsibility, with increasing delegation of choices to various experts and authorities. There is, one could say, an inverse relation between the material progress we have achieved and the competence or responsibility we exercise as individuals. To live a simple, comparatively non-technologized life is difficult for anyone, these days, and virtually impossible for urban-dwellers. One might contend that it is also unnecessary and foolish to aspire to simplicity, but we are talking about individual options and choice, not about some circumstantially compelling consensus as to what is sensible or right. Meanwhile, a great many thoughtful persons have observed that this growing reduction in competence is weakening to character, to the human capacity to understand and exercise freedom, and limiting to the ranges of originality and the possibility of achieving personal balance and serenity in life.

In consequence of this ordinary person's—citizen's or layman's—diagnosis, there are those who try to redress balances, restore self-reliance, widen individual responsibility, limit conformity by the canons of intelligent evaluation, and, when necessary, give confidence and trust to those specialists or experts who manifest a similar outlook in their practice. Just as orthodoxies and establishments, being by definition imperfect or incomplete and subject to revision, have the responsibility to allow dissenting opinion and new ideas a fair hearing, so the lay individual has an equal responsibility to open his mind to those avenues of change which he as an individual may recognize as vital to the health of his personal enterprise, which is living *a constructive, self-reliant life.* This becomes possible through knowledge, but not, precisely, *scientific* knowledge, since scientific knowledge will be complete only in some hypothetical Greek Kalends, while human beings must act *now,* and from day to day, whatever the state of the science whose relevance may apply.

So the layman's task is to decide, not so much which orthodoxy to submit to, but whose imperfections are likely to be the least harmful, if it comes to trusting himself to an expert's care. History is too filled with evidence of the gross mistakes of conventional conceptions of knowledge for the intelligent man to give blind adherence to *any* expert. And the professional man whose credo requires that the layman retain as much responsibility as possible is one who is likely to be on the side of authentic health, since from broad experience we know that delegation of responsibility and choice is *making us all sick,* regardless of the gains and/or errors of a technical sort, along the way.

This was the kind of thinking that led to our praise of Dr. Bieler's book. We should have added that other reputable doctors express doubt as to the validity of his thinking about toxicity. They may be right. We can't say. We can say only that he seemed to give the reader ample warning against uninformed enthusiasms and the human tendency to indulge fads or simplistic doctrines without first gaining some basic knowledge of nutrition. The book teems with exposes of faddist notions and formula cures. But it also exposés the extent of iatrogenic (doctor-caused) illness in a way that seems beyond refutation, and makes plain a variety of cultural delusions for which we all, doctors along with the rest of us, must answer and learn how to correct.

We might say, finally, that we do not regard this as a medical question or problem at all, but as a basic human problem. Conceivably, what Croce said about Vico might eventually be applied by a qualified medical historian to Bieler. Not being so qualified, we cannot apply it to him, for it may not fit either the man or his profession. Yet we quote again the passage from Croce for its suggestiveness in relation to all men who work as pioneers, meet opposition and ridicule, yet continue without abating their efforts, and who in time come to be appreciated and honored:

> . . if Vico lacked the critical sense in small matters, in great matters he had abundance of it. Careless, headstrong and confused in detail, cautious, logical penetrative. in essentials; he exposes his flank or rather his whole body to . . . attacks . . . absorbed by his own discoveries, often he does not give his power of investigation and observation time and room to develop, and instead of history he invents myths and investigates romances; but when he allows the power free play, it does wonders for the field of history. . . .

Well, but history is a harmless affair, while *medicine* touches us in our vital parts! This comment would be short-term thinking. Vico labored to refute the mechanistic assumptions of Descartes, and had he been more successful, orthodox science, including medical science, might be in much better case, so far as concerns sensitive understanding of the human body in health and disease. Many men of science have lately given evidence of this view, of whom Alexis Carrel was perhaps the first and one of the most outspoken. Ultimately, our health is determined by how we think of ourselves, and what we hold ourselves responsible for. This is the area of common human competence, and our choices here give tone and direction to everything else we do. If we make fatal mistakes in this area, the best of science can do little to help us, since our habits will thwart its benefits, making them only temporary. A look at the list of diseases which are now major in terminating human life seems sufficient evidence of this.

REVIEW
WHAT SERVES "PHILOSOPHY"?

WHAT does it mean to teach or study "philosophy" these days? The only answer we have had to this question came from random conversations with a few students and some recollections of a *New York Times* article (April 24, 1966) by Lewis Feuer, in which he said that academic philosophy was little more than training "in disputation in the medieval tradition," and that the innovators in thought in the West have had "almost no connection with universities." He also observed: "When philosophy becomes academic, the results are much the same as when art becomes academic."

So, finding a new book, *Philosophy—an Introduction to the Art of Wondering* (Rinehart Press, 1973, $10.95), by James L. Christian, amply praised by a reviewer, we wrote for a copy, hoping for the best. After reading in it some, we are still uncertain about what it means to teach or study philosophy. That might be a recommendation, of course, since somewhere in the book there is probably a quotation which says that philosophy begins with uncertainty. But besides uncertainty there is nibbling dissatisfaction. Why? Mr. Christian has apparently done everything in his power to make the subject seem delectable. The book is large, having more than 500 pages, and on every one are marginal accents in the form of pithy sayings, from Thales to R. D. Laing. There are also lots of well selected quotations in the running text—making the book a kind of *Bartlett's* of philosophical *bon mots.* Pictures, too, and even a few comic strips embodying catchy half-truths and minor profundities.

Since he has to start somewhere, Mr. Christian says that philosophy tries to give an account of *meaning*—the kind of meaning we depend upon to explain or refer everything else to. It is also, he says, a "method" in the ultimate "do-it-yourself" enterprise. Instead of having content, philosophy is the practice of learning how to learn. Because the present "unhappy condition of human knowledge"—vast accumulations of fact in unrelated fields—tends to fragment our lives, we need to see things whole; and in the service of this need the author offers a "synoptic" view of the world of thought. The book provides a smorgasbord of insights across the ages, arranged in segments which give reasonable order to a search that is supposed to look *everywhere.* These eight parts present the reflections of men on Wondering, the Human Odyssey, What Knowledge is (or isn't) and How we Know it (or don't), the Inner World, Love and Hate, What we Learn from Biology, from Astronomers and Physicists, and the meaning of Ultimate Concern.

Since there is really good material in this book, we might begin by saying that perhaps there is "too much." In other words, is this the way to teach philosophy? We suspect that Ortega was right, here, as in so many other connections. He said that the task of the teacher is not to "transmit" the intellectual deposits of our culture, but to do something that generates the yearning to know. How? Nobody knows, but it happens now and then. Ortega was pretty good at it. In fairness to Mr. Christian, it should be said that he attempts to transmit questions rather than answers. Should he be blamed, then, for wanting to exhibit all the main paradigms of inquiry?

What *is* a book on philosophy, anyway? Should it be philosophy, or just about philosophy? Is a book "about" philosophy necessary or best for students who don't really hunger to know, but yearn to go through the experience of being "educated," for a number of probably unimportant but pressing reasons?

Can a teacher of philosophy in a university also be a philosopher, or are these mutually exclusive activities? When William Morris was invited to stand for Professor of Poetry at Oxford University, he declined on the ground that he was a practitioner. "It seems to me," he said, "that the *practice* of any art rather narrows the artist in

regard to the *theory* of it." Is it then the task of the teacher not to be a practitioner, in the interest of breadth and catholicity? This doesn't sound like the right answer.

In the current (Winter) *American Scholar,* Margaret Freydberg quotes Willa Cather on why a fine writer gets through to readers: "It is the light behind his books and is the living quality in his sentences." *That* is what we hoped for in a book on philosophy, and the question may be, Is this a just expectation? It might be that anyone who sets out to philosophize must generate his own light, that he can't get it from others, but it remains true that some books *do* have light in them, and that these books *do* help to light little fires in the people who read them.

A book about philosophy must be in some sense a history—a history or catalog of ideas men have thought in the past. The ideas apart from the men and their times tend to become mere intellectual abstractions, logical exercises. You examine, classify, judge, and go on to another idea or set. This is quite different from betting your life on what you find reason to believe, and philosophy is or ought to be the discipline for betting your life. A book on philosophy, then, should deal with this necessity, and close in upon the reader somewhat as Socrates used to close in on his fellow Athenians. What, he would say, are you going to do about it? A lot of the time he upset them. He was, as he explained, trying to stir up some *yearning* in them. Without that, nothing would matter. They would become just another bunch of Sophists.

In his way, Ortega was a modern Socratic. You feel the urgency in his writing. If you take Ortega seriously, you can't be just a taster. He requires you to think, to take a position. It has been our observation that people who take Ortega seriously develop a strong philosophic current in their own thought—a kind of continuing "light" that keeps on coming through. In *Concord and Liberty,* Ortega talks about the history of philosophy and says there can't be any, although you can try to make one, and perhaps should. The "historical sense" was for Ortega a key to self-knowledge:

> It is this organ that grants to man the farthest distance he can travel away from himself, while at the same time it presents him, as by rebound, with the clearest understanding an individual can gain of himself. For when, in his effort to understand former generations, he comes upon the suppositions under which they lived, and that means upon their limitations, he will, by the same token, realize what are the implied conditions under which he lives himself and which circumscribe his existence. By the detour called history he will become aware of his own bounds, and that is the one and only way open to man by which to transcend them.

But history—which for Ortega *is* philosophy—has another role:

> It is the mission of history to make our fellow beings acceptable to us. To understand other people, I have nothing else to resort to than the stuff which is my life. Only my life has of itself "meaning" and is therefore intelligible. . . .My life is the universal interpreter. And history as an intellectual discipline is the systematic endeavor to make of any other human being an *alter ego,* in which expression both terms—the *alter* and the *ego*—must be taken at their full value. I strive to construe my neighbor as an *I* who is another *I*—an *alter ego,* something at once near and distant. . . . my neighbor, though being the *other,* does not seem to be irremediably bound to be *other* than I. I continue to feel that, in principle, he could be I. Love and friendship live on this belief and this hope; they are extreme forms of assimilation between the *I* and the *you.* But people of bygone times are not simply different from me as are my contemporaries; they have no possible way of not being different. . . . whereas of my contemporary I always hope that he may at last become like me. I have in my intercourse with ancient man no other way of understanding him than to assimilate myself imaginatively to him—that is, to become that other man. The technique of such intellectual unselfishness is called history.

We have quoted Ortega at some length, hoping to suggest the kind of intensity that is needed if a reader or student is to get anything from the history of philosophy. A true philosopher is a man who risks his very destiny on his ideas—the ideas he lives by. To understand

him is to in some sense "become" him—to feel what he felt and think what he thought, and often to care about what hecared about. Then, knowing him from the inside, one is ready to form an opinion about his ideas.

Well, perhaps some of the thinkers quoted by Mr. Christian will prove starting points of study animated by this kind of intensity for some of the readers of his book. The presentation of past thinkers is certainly engaging, and the author draws in many sources which are not conventionally "philosophical" at all, which should have a desirable effect. But we can't help wondering if another kind of book—some sort of Plato's *Republic* for our time, *a Phaedo* or a *Gorgias,* or an *Apology*—might not prove more successful in *involving* students in philosophical thinking. Putting practically "everybody" in one book may not be the best way.

We are not, of course, really commenting on Mr. Christian's rather monumental accomplishment, but questioning the assumptions of the entire academic approach to learning. Philosophy, as we see it, should be the means of stirring people to take charge of their own lives, starting with an examination of the principles by which they live. Nobody can box the compass of all human thought, yet real philosophy is bound to be a distillation of all human thought, and who has it to offer in a school or a book?

What do you do, when you live at a time when there are more "questions and answers" and fewer "solutions" than in any other epoch of history? When, if you want to know about some subject, you can quickly find out more than you need to know by consulting Mr. Adler's Syntopicon' or the *New Britannica;* or listen to a fine recording of any piece of music; or see the best reproduction of any work of art? It's all there; you just plug in for it, somewhat as we used to for food, once upon a time, at the Automat. Why do people like Mumford and Andre Malraux believe that education and life are blighted by all this affluence in opportunities to see, to read, to be "informed"? Is it that the very preciousness of high meanings is obscured by so much wealth? Scarcity may not be desirable, but uncommonness is surely essential, and the quality of great thought tends to leak out of big anthologies: it may still be there, but people don't see it by reason of the "customer" and "taster" mood anthologies and survey courses seem to generate.

COMMENTARY
ON SELF EDUCATION

JOHN HOLT speaks of self-education. Here is something on how Anne Lindbergh pursued hers, taken from Robert Kirsch's (*Los Angeles Times*) review of the third volume of her diaries and letters (*Locked Rooms and Open Doors*)*:*

> She struggled to find significance as a poet does in the arena and setting of the world, in the wisdom of other poets, in introspection and expression. She read Rilke, from whom comes the metaphor of the title: "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a foreign tongue." And Baudelaire: "For freedom is not to be found in any accident or adjustment of the circumstances of life but only in willing realization and acceptance of the conditions under which life is carried on."

Anais Nin says in her diaries: *"Science* may heal, but it is the poetic illumination of life that makes my patients fall in love with life, makes them recover their appetite for it." In the Winter 1974 *New Directions* Anne Marie Smith and Richard Lehr Munger use this sentence as the basis of an effort to restore the poetry of life to education. Since they teach, they tell of experiences which helped them to prepare:

> One profound sense of personal illumination for one of the authors came in a mundane lecture on American abstract art. The instructor showed a series of paintings by Mark Rothko and talked about his theories of stillness and the unconscious needs of man for peace. During the course of the lecture, she began to block the voice of the instructor and listen to some forgotten inner voices. She pondered the meaning of stillness in her life, the need she often felt for cataclysms to accompany creative spurts, her conflicting need for solitude and peace. She spent the entire hour musing on the universality of these questions—wondering if anyone else in the class had experienced her thoughts. . . .
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> Another illumination came from a basic course in chemistry. While learning of quantum mechanics and the affinity of electrons for the lowest possible energy level, she perceived an analogy in human experience. She sensed that people, like electrons, tended to stay in the energy level most basic to them. Any attempt to excite themselves by roles or deceptions into unnatural behaviors would most likely end in collapse, eventual re-evaluation, and a return to their most inherent behavior. . . .
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> Discovery, joy, love, failure, ecstasy, inner success—all these should be integrated within cognitive material. For what is the cognitive but an expression of some forgotten man's creativity?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
TOWARD PAIDEIA

IN an "Open Letter" to CIDOC (Ivan Illich's Center for Intercultural Documentation, Cuernavaca, Mexico), John Holt speaks of the need to encourage a free press, as means of enriching basic educational resources:

> For very much less than what it costs to build a classroom—indeed for a small fraction of that cost—we can put into each neighborhood a multilith press and associated equipment that would make it possible for the people right in that neighborhood to produce their own neighborhood newsletters (what in older times used to be called broadsheets) about whatever interests them or to prepare texts on many subjects for all the people in the neighborhood, including children and students in schools. I read all the time that schools in poor neighborhoods are in a bind because they cannot afford to buy the expensive materials commercially produced. Why not give them the power to print and distribute their own materials to their own communities? . . .
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> In short, I would like to expand enormously our definition of what we understand by educational resources, and not just limit them to those items that would help people learn out of school the things now being taught in school. I've done an immense amount of self-educating since I left school twenty-nine years ago, and none of it has been in classes or with school textbooks. Thus a textbook is almost by definition a book that nobody would read unless he were compelled to.

On this last point, it has long seemed to us that there are too many mediocre books in print, and that bibliographies listing only the best books on given areas of study would be vastly superior to textbooks. The lists could include brief essays connecting the recommended volumes.

As for local, indigenous papers, there are really two requirements, and only one of them is funds. The other is having something to say. A happy combination of funds with thought deserving to be printed would be the goal. If the funds existed, their use might be patterned after the way the Land Trust makes land available—to people who demonstrate the capacity to work the land. The Poor People's Corporation in Jackson, Mississippi, operates in this fashion—or used to. Early in the 60s when dispossessed sharecroppers showed a strong desire and partial readiness to start a producers' co-op, the PPC would devote some of its meager resources to getting them both the training they needed and a place to work. This kind of funding requires both administrative intelligence and educational sagacity. Knowledge of the market is important, too.

Meanwhile, there are excellent examples of the kind of publishing John Holt would like to see more of. One is a lithoed sixteen-page paper, *Return to Learning*, issued by the Fort Wayne (Indiana) Folk School. Terry Doran is the prime mover in this activity, and he also does a seminar series called "Theatre for Ideas" which has become popular among Fort Wayners—"an open forum program that is community-based, involving people of all levels of education and all backgrounds in the discussion of current social problems, using the resources of the local community rather than importing experts." With no outside support, Terry Doran began "Theatre for Ideas" as an attempt "to bring people together without the structure of a class, grades, a teacher-expert, and well-defined roles for all participants."

You can say a lot of words in single-spaced typing on sixteen 8½" x 11" pages, and the Fort Wayne paper is rich with the local talent mentioned. In a rollicking satire, "Why Students Don't Think," Eliot Watson reports what he found out in "research by interview."

> "Pardon me," I said to one barefoot, braless, longhaired young lady who seemed under the influence of something or other. She was acting very strange. "But would you mind telling me if you think?"
>
> "Think about what, man?"
>
> "Anything. Anything with any depth to it.
>
> "Thinking's not where it's at, man!"
>
> "Oh?"

"Right. Oh man, gettin' off, that's where it's at. Groovin' with the sun and the elements. Gettin' on with the sounds. Ya know?"

After interviewing "a total of 2,733 students," of whom 2,168 "thought maybe they had heard of the word somewhere," he despairingly turned to some professors. A Professor of Psychology summarized the self-image of most of them when he declared: "Of course I think. How do you think I got to be a Professor? I got a Ph.D. don't I?"

There were a few variants:

Some refused to talk to me because *I* didn't have a Ph.D. One who did agree to speak with me seemed a bit confused. He was a Professor of Philosophy, and he mumbled, "Let me see. It seems I once ran across something like it in my research. Oh, dear me, where is that folder?"

But a Professor of Political Science probably gave me the most definite answer: "I think that I think that the state of today's society in a nontotalitarian sense parallels the rise and fall of the Laisser-Faire policy of big business concerning the involvements of capitalistic countries is a matter of concern for all serious-minded thinkers. And you can quote me on that."

The most concise answer, however, belongs to a Professor of Theology, who answered simply, "If God had intended Man to think, He would have given him a mind."

A Professor of English replied that, "Mark Twain, or was it Moby Dick, or maybe it was Charles Dickens, I'm not sure, but one of our great writers had some very interesting things to say on the subject."

The people in the Education Department were annoyed. "We're too busy to think," one of them snarled, but offered to ask the Dean to make a brief "policy statement." On the way out the researcher spotted a man who looked important, and asked him if Administrators did any thinking. He got this reply:

"Why, of course they think. They have to think in order to keep all these people from thinking. . . . they don't have to think very much or very hard 'cause it's really a pretty easy thing to do. And it's getting easier and easier all the time. Teachers are no problem 'cause they'll do anything you tell 'em in order to keep their job. Best thing they did for students was to start Open Visitation Policies, 'cause now there's hardly any danger of em ever thinking. You give most kids access to sex, food, drugs, music, and money and they ain't ever goin' to think."

. . . What a rare, honest thoughtful answer! I couldn't get over it. "I certainly appreciate your honesty and it was a real pleasure talking with you, I said excitedly. "What did you say you were Dean of?"

"Dean? I'm no Dean. I'm just the janitor."

FRONTIERS

With the Statisticians . . .

IN the *SR/World* for March 9, Anthony Wolff reports that National Safety Council figures show a substantial decrease in automobile accident fatalities as a result of the slow-down in driving and the general reduction in traffic. Since last Thanksgiving, the toll has diminished from 15 to 20 per cent. A projection of this decline indicates that measures adopted because of the fuel shortage may "save as many as 14,000 of the 56,000 lives lost annually in automobile accidents."

Another interesting set of figures appears in the Winter *War Resistance* (organ of WRI):

> Each B-52 bomber contains 41,000 gallons of gasoline.
>
> A compact car that gets 25 miles to a gallon could travel 1,025,000 miles on the amount of fuel that one B-52 contains. And 41,000 gallons could operate 1,500 average cars for one week. How many homes would that heat?

In a guest editorial for the *SR/W* (same issue), Paul Woodring fills a page with comment on the gross miscalculations of experts who have been trying to anticipate population trends for about three hundred years. Most of their predictions, it seems, have been wrong. Moreover, they don't seem to learn any caution. Even in the late 60s the Census Bureau declared that the U.S. fertility rate would be between 84.1 and 127.6 in 1975. But early in 1973 it went down to 69, and continues to decline.

> Even after the decline in birthrate had become obvious demographers continued to predict that there would be another sharp rise in the early Seventies. Then, they said, the number of potential parents would begin to reflect the rising birthrates of the early Fifties. That seemed logical enough, but it didn't happen. On the contrary, the number of babies born in the United States dropped by 9 per cent between 1971 and 1972 and then another 4 per cent during the first half of 1973. We are now experiencing the most rapid decline in birthrate in the nation's history.

What happens when people believe these actuarial dreams? For one thing, education schools relying on such predictions trained far too many teachers in the late 60s. The medical schools turned out a great many pediatricians when they should have been producing gerontologists. Low predictions led to houses with too few bedrooms in the 40s and high ones caused too many bedrooms in the 60s. Since all the factors suspected to be behind the decline in births are still at work, Mr. Woodring ends:

> I am willing to bet that the birthrate in the United States will keep dropping for at least a few more years and that we shall reach zero population growth much sooner than anyone has predicted. As a scientist, however, I think it safer to say, "I just don't know." All I can safely predict is that the demographers will be wrong again.

Another effect of high population predictions was the building of too many colleges. John F. Budd, Jr., reports in the education section of *SR/W:*

> About a year ago it was estimated that one private college a week was either closed or taken over by the state. The reasons offered are as valid and creative as those developed by any hard-pressed stockbroker to rationalize his client's depressed portfolio. The simple fact is that supposedly pragmatic businessmen [the trustees] allowed themselves to be caught up in the euphoria of the educational passion back in the Sixties and committed their institutions to multimillion-dollar capital expansion programs designed to absorb the mushrooming student population that never really materialized.

Other causes were involved besides the population growth slow-down—chiefly the Vietnam war taking the students and the general disenchantment of the young with higher education. In any case, the waste involved in large-scale planning based on miscalculation is evident. Ingenious making-do may be the only sensible policy.

Readers will perhaps remember Ivan Illich's current interest in exposing the false claims of "health insurance" programs. He points out that

health is not a product of "doctoring," but of family and community common sense, concern, and hygiene. Now a Washington bulletin, *In the Public Interest*, presents a statement by Congressman Symington (Mo.):

> The fact is today in spite of the concerted efforts of the medical profession, of state and federal legislative bodies, of organizations devoted to health, both public and private throughout this country—here is the situation—under America's health care system you will have a very good chance to live a life of health if you are rich enough to afford it, if you are sick at the right time of day, if you speak the doctor's language, if you have adequate health insurance, if you live in a non-ghetto, non-rural region, if you don't bleed to death while being questioned about your Blue Cross and Medicare numbers, if you have time to wait in an overcrowded emergency room, and if you are not maimed on the way to the hospital by untrained attendants.

Doubtless the Congressman exaggerates, but there is enough truth in his indictment to give us pause. And even so, the application of remedies is not health care, but medicine. Those who happen to think that Illich is a "radical" who presses this point too hard might read René Dubos' *The Mirage of Health*, published in 1959, in which a whole chapter is devoted to making the same distinction. It is called "Hygiea and Asclepius," respectively the goddess of health and the god of medicine. Dr. Dubos holds the excessive emphasis since Pasteur on the germ theory of disease responsible for the slighting of hygiene in favor of "treatment" and expecting doctors to do it all. He says: "As disease and other failures of adaptation are obvious and often dramatic, whereas health and fitness are considered the 'normal' state and therefore unnoticed, it is not surprising that the cult of Hygiea tends to be neglected and that the skill of Asclepius looms large and bright in the mind of man." Illich is saying the same thing, but with considerably more bite.