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A LEVEL OF PLANNING

THE idea of deliberate human improvement on a social scale has played a central part in modern thought ever since Giambattista Vico declared that the social world is the work of men. Revolution and education have been the most popular instruments of change, and while many changes have been brought about by these means, whether or not, in consequence, there has been much improvement in the quality of human beings is an open question. Equally open is the question of what sort of "leverage" is most effective in raising the level of human life in terms of vision, integrities, and the practical excellences of daily affairs.

Solzhenitsyn's just published *Gulag Archipelago* is a revealing commentary on the hopes of revolution in the conventional Western pattern. A *Saturday Review/World* (April 20) reviewer gives the Russian writer's comparison between the terrorism of the Czarist regime, "the most backward and despotic" in Europe, and that of the Soviets:

> Solzhenitsyn notes that those executed between 1826 and 1906 in Russia amounted to 894. In the revolutionary days of 1905-1908, 2200 executions took place. In Lenin's time, very incomplete figures for the central provinces alone estimate that 16,000 were shot in eighteen months. Even in December 1932, before the Stalin terror proper, he notes the shooting of 265 people at one time in the Kresty Prison in Leningrad. And, in peacetime, at the height of the terror, a *minimum* of just under a million were executed in two years—that is, a rate about *fifty thousand* times as great as that of sixty years of czardom back to Nicholas I!

Another reviewer, Harrison Salisbury (in the April *Atlantic*), quoting Solzhenitsyn, says that the population of the Soviet prison system during Stalin's time totalled about twelve million, "with an intake as high as 3 million a year to maintain that average because of the terrible death rate."

Lenin's revolutionary cadres were not able to generate widespread support for the Bolshevik program. This expectation had died very soon after the Revolution. In *Living My Life*, Emma Goldman describes the disillusionment of Maxim Gorki when she saw him in Moscow in 1920, after she and Alexander Berkman had been deported from the United States. She reported what Gorki said:

> The Revolution had dispelled the bubble of the goodness and naivete of this peasantry. It had proved them shrewd, avaricious, and lazy, even savage in their joy of causing pain. The role played by the counter-revolutionary Yudeniches, he added, was too obvious to need special emphasis. That is why he had not considered it necessary even to mention them, nor the intelligentsia, which had been talking revolution for over fifty years and then was the first to stab it in the back with sabotage and conspiracies. But all these were contributory factors, not the main cause. The roots were inherent in Russia's brutal and uncivilized masses, he said. They have no cultural traditions, no social values, no respect for human rights and life. They cannot be moved by anything except coercion and force.

John Reed had adopted similar views. When Emma Goldman expressed disturbance and shock at the execution of five hundred prisoners, considered counter-revolutionists, on the eve of a decree abolishing the death penalty, Reed told her she was "confused" by the realities of Revolution because she had previously dealt with it "only in theory." Speaking of Kerensky and others who had once been "pioneers," Reed said:

> "I don't give a damn for their past. I am concerned only in what the treacherous gang has been doing during the past three years. To the wall with them! I say. I have learned one mighty expressive Russian word, *'razstrellyat'!"* (execute by shooting).

Brooding on the record of violent historical change, and on agonies such as Solzhenitsyn has now made unforgettable, Everett Dean Martin

wrote his best book, *Farewell to Revolution* (1935), casting up the account of destruction and suffering chargeable to revolution. He said in his last chapter:

> Everywhere people propose solutions for the problems of the world who act and speak as if such men as Plato Aristotle, Cicero, Erasmus, Milton, Locke, Voltaire, Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill had never existed! I wonder what men thought a century ago when they said that the school house was to be the foundation of our free institutions? Did they mean merely an education which would improve the individual's opportunities in a competitive struggle for money? Did they mean a patriotic propaganda which would make the population the half grown up victims of crowd appeal? Did they mean schooling which would lead to mere socialization without understanding or habits of reflection? Or did they mean to encourage reasonableness among the people and so see to it that there would be a sensitive and critical public opinion?

Quite evidently, Martin recognized the fraud in much of modern education, yet placed his hopes for human betterment in the ideal:

> Education preserves and enhances liberty, not only by acquainting people with facts, but most of all by putting the mind in immediate contact with the great free master minds of all ages. Then something happens, something of excellence and human understanding, something liberating, is caught up out of the ashes of the past, which crosses the dead centuries and lives to enrich and light the present. Revolutions have their passing hour and are gone. They come like dreams of horror, they pass and leave but exhaustion and sad awakening. But the stream of wisdom coursing through the centuries flows steadily on. Lost for a time it appears richer and deeper than before. It has brought with it such freedom and civilization as man has yet known.

Now we begin to feel the dilemma which haunts twentieth-century man, for while we may accept the judgment that violent revolution is futile and wasteful, we have come to be almost as skeptical of education. Everett Dean Martin speaks of education in ideal terms: We can easily agree with him in principle, but he gives us no outline of practice. Back in the 1930s, George S. Counts, of Columbia's Teachers College and the *Social Frontier*, declared that the schools could and should become the agencies of revolutionary change. Progressivism was the doctrine, science and social science the guide, and socialist vision the inspiration. But it didn't work. Whatever the explanation of the failures of this movement—which are doubtless several—we now have the verdict on the sort of schools that exist in the present, from such critics as John Holt, Edgar Friedenberg, Ivan Illich, Carl Rogers, and Paul Goodman. If we accept their judgment, then education, whatever it really is, will have to take place somewhere else. Or in some other way.

In what way?

This question brings us up against a deeply engrained habit of thinking. We tend to regard as unreal any social process which is not institutionalized and established by public recognition. A teacher is not a teacher unless he has a teaching certificate. A child is not educated unless he is sent to school. A doctor is not a doctor unless he has a diploma from a board of medical examiners. Left entirely out of account by this sort of thinking are all the indefinable influences of the social and natural environment. John Holt said recently:

> 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 textbooks. Thus a textbook is almost by definition a book that nobody would read unless he were compelled to.

After voicing much the same objections to public education that he made in *Growing Up Absurd*, Paul Goodman (in the *New York Review of Books* for April 10, 1969) proposed as an alternative what he called "incidental education":

> . . . in all societies, both primitive and highly civilized, until quite recently most education of most children has occurred incidentally. Adults do their work and other social tasks, children are not

> excluded, are paid attention to, and learn to be included. The children are not "taught." . . . In Greek *paideia* the entire network of institutions, the *polis*, was thought of as importantly an educator. . . .
>
> The goal of elementary pedagogy is a very modest one: it is for a small child, under his own steam, to poke interestedly into whatever goes on and to be able, by observation, questions, and practical imitation, to get something out of it in his own terms. In our society this happens pretty well at home up to age four, but after that it becomes forbiddingly difficult.

Well, we have made a beginning in thinking about alternative education, but not much more. The real teacher, we find, is the *community*, which is no new idea, but dates from the ancient Greeks. Just to get back to what the Greeks did so well might be progress for us, but our hope is to do even better, although, at the outset, we shall be fortunate to do as much. There are numerous obstacles. As Goodman says, after age four learning from the community becomes forbiddingly difficult. Our urban and suburban areas, for one thing, are sterilely bare of vital social processes. A wandering child can no longer visit a blacksmith shop. He may be herded on some industrial tour, but the experience of modern technology has little of the craft and the artisan in it, although ingenious teachers may be able to find a few examples of the practice of individual skills that children can understand.

The redesign of communities into places suitable for growing children seems an enormous task, and we have little reason to expect much cooperation from either business or government, since both are institutionalized and bureaucratized to the hilt and staffed by people unable to recognize that social and economic processes which shut out ordinary human comprehension are patterns of cultural self-destruction. The communitarians are doing what they can to create another sort of field of experience for the young, but on a national scale their effort is still at the token stage. What else can people do?

The objective is to begin to undertake, in one way or another, the reforming, altering, and regenerating tasks that institutions have proved themselves unable to accomplish. What we are really considering is the formation of human character. How does it occur? Are some circumstances better for the development of character than others? What part can or should individuals play?

Many years ago an American engineer, Arthur E. Morgan, asked himself these questions. He devoted most of his long and productive life to a search for answers; while he found some clues, nothing that he has written on the subject of constructive social change has the note of finality. In a book which appeared in 1936 he set down his understanding of the problem:

> When I use the word "character" I have in mind three elements. First is purposefulness, or the pattern of desire—the vision of the life it would be well to lead, of the kind of a world which, so far as wisdom, judgment, and good will can determine, it would be well to live in.
>
> Second, I include good will and the skilled and disciplined drive which presses toward the realization of aims and purposes. Great insight into what would constitute a good life for one's self and for society has value only as expressed in well-considered action, though under the term "action" I should include the disciplined and carefully expressed thinking of the student, and the work of the artist, as well as the more obvious activity of the laborer or the businessman. . . .
>
> The third factor is ethical or moral quality, the habitual choice of means that are wholesome in their own effects. Even when the desired aim is good and the disciplined energy great, it is important that the methods used shall be in themselves ethical or moral.

After years of observation of the behavior and attitudes of human beings, Dr. Morgan concluded that the small community is the best environment for the formation of good or strong character. He had tried a more direct approach, reviving Antioch College in 1921, and working with young people there for about fourteen years—until he became the head of the Tennessee Valley Authority—but concluded that the college age was too late for the

sort of development he had in mind. It was for this reason that, after TVA, he devoted all his energies to fostering the community movement—a work in which he is still active, today, at ninety-five, in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

The book we are using here is *The Long Road*, a brief statement of his convictions about the importance of community and an account of its most valuable ingredients. The question before us is the growth and establishment of social forms which are educative in the sense of the *paideia* of the Greeks, and which can be worked toward deliberately by those who have concluded that there is nothing else important to do.

In one place in *The Long Road*, Morgan lays down a first principle:

> It was with some insight that William James said, "I am done with great things and big things, great institutions and big success, and I am for those tiny, invisible, molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootless, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which, if you give them time, will rend the hardest monuments of man's pride."
>
> The necessity for working out our pattern of life on a small scale need not be looked upon as a limitation. It may be the very condition that makes success possible.

Everything that Morgan says in development of this idea is institutionally vague, yet organically clear. For example the following:

> There is scarcely any more effective means for bringing about social change than the "apostolic succession" that results from the intimate association of persons of clear purpose and great commitment with small groups of young people. Leaders in business and in public life are men of exceptional native ability, who project onto the larger scene of action the motives and methods they have acquired during early years. Although mature persons of good intelligence continue to profit by experience and responsibility, and grow as they work, yet for most of us the main drives of purpose and our fundamental ethical controls usually are carried over from youth. Thus the environment of childhood and youth actually determines the quality of the leadership of a few years later. If there exist throughout our country many homes, neighborhoods, schools, churches, colleges, and informal fellowships, within which such qualities of character as I have described are dominant, then out of such environment will emerge men and women who will give the same qualities to the management of business and government. I see no other source of leadership than such centers of influence, which may be ever so humble and unseen, and yet be potent. . . .
>
> In almost any community, a person who actually determines to achieve a great pattern for living can find some few others to share that adventure. Whether one be teacher, minister, businessman, farmer, or housewife, it is generally possible to find a few associates, perhaps young people, who will sincerely unite in a common effort to bring the conduct of life into conformity with the highest standards. Practice at leadership in intimate relationships and on a small scale is the best training for more extensive activity. The making of our future in business, in government, and in life generally is in the hands of every person of sincere purpose and of strong courage. It is not reserved for the elect.

Morgan is talking about planting the seed for authentic human community, a task to be taken on by people who are able to hold within themselves a vital conception of the ideal to be achieved, and who will work at it continually, in all their daily relationships, in order to bring some part of it into existence. As he says:

> There are times when adoption of fundamentally new principles promises greater benefit than reliance on gradual evolutionary methods. The changes in character and motive which we need are not just ameliorative of our present business and political ethics, but are very great and fundamental—so fundamental that we may call them revolutionary, and they need support in order to become defined, stabilized, and permanent. They might be furthered by people of like mind and purpose gathered together in large enough groups to constitute effective social and economic units. . . .
>
> There is no one road to a better social order, and every person must find the road that is possible to him, rather than mourn the fact that some other is not open. The very diversity of the approaches may be a great advantage. I believe it desirable for every person to define as clearly as possible the qualities which would characterize any good social order, and

> to endeavor to the utmost to achieve those qualities in actual practice, without compromise or dilution, in whatever may be his work.

In connection with these suggestions, Arthur Morgan sketches the lives of a dozen or so individuals who illustrate the kind of effort and dedication he speaks of. At the end of the book, he says:

> Is there any desirable common pattern of action suggested by these brief sketches? I might endeavor to sum up their inferences into a concise and definite philosophy and scheme of endeavor. Perhaps it is better to end with an impression of loose ends and of incompleteness, for then some reader may be impelled to work out his own inferences and to achieve his own synthesis. It is not that which is given us ready made, but what we create for ourselves, for which we have a feeling of living value. It would be my wish to provide a stimulus to creative effort, not a formula for acceptance. Thus are those persons disappointed who turn to the last paragraph of a book to find the conclusion.

It is nearly forty years since *The Long Road* was first published (it is still in print, available from Community Service, Inc., Box 243, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387), and there have been varied changes on the American scene since that time. Many more people today have embraced the vision to which Morgan gave expression, and there is a sense in which ours is now a "looser" society, more open to innovation, less bound by habit and narrow tradition. There are also obstacles, an opposing momentum, and a general loss of discipline which makes any sort of achievement difficult, but the keynote of all such efforts, and the call to action, is still well expressed in Arthur Morgan's words:

> Keeping in mind all the dangers and difficulties involved, for many reasons it would be desirable for persons who are committed to actually achieving what I have called the universal expedients of a good social order, to begin to build their own economic and social world. If such men are to escape the constant dilution of their purposes by society at large, it is desirable that there be *islands of brotherhood* where men of like purposes can strengthen each other and can create a milieu in accordance with the universal expedients of a good life.

Plans for the actual transformation of modern society into communities that will serve the educational objectives of *paideia* may now be premature, save for those heroic efforts that have already created their "islands" of influence, with new patterns of human relations being worked out by pioneers in communal associations. Such attempts will doubtless continue, and some of them will flower, but meanwhile a wider effort is necessary to generate attitudes and habits of mind which are basically *hospitable* to the dreams of the communitarians and of educators of the stature of John Holt, Paul Goodman, and a few others. For then diverse human effort will more easily find a fertile soil in which to take root, and a friendly climate in which to ripen. Social transformation is an active process, not a definable goal. The best environment for any child is one that is altering, opening up, changing for the better from day to day. Dr. Morgan's little book is an account of the elements of such an environment. His life has been an illuminating example of the practice the book recommends.

REVIEW
SONG OF WORK

THERE are no intermediaries in Annie Dillard's book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (Harper's Magazine Press, 1974, $7.95). It is direct contact throughout, continuous and minute awareness of rushing multitudes; wherever she looks—in a stream, in a book, at an aphid or a sycamore—the rhythm of life comes into the prose, making it sing. Herman Melville once wrote about a time when, lying on the ground, he seemed to take root and become part of the earth. His hair turned to grass, his bones were rocks, and he breathed with the vagrant breeze. Melville's doubt of the oceanic, of the allness of which a man—or a mystic—is capable crumpled, and he confessed his conversion while the world flowed through him for a fraction of infinity.

This is a rather special family of man—the people able to feel and think like mountains, like grasshoppers and crocuses, like ancestors and the unborn. Now and then one comes along, and the reader who feels in himself the germs of the same capacity turns the pages with awe and affection. Will you set such writing to metaphysics? Its substance is the stuff that comes before metaphysics, which has the ring whose intellectual echoes may give shape to ontological theory. It invokes the energies of which doctrines are the after-thoughts, straining extrapolations to assuage man's reflective longing to know how everything works.

Annie Dillard lives in Virginia, in a place where there are streams and trees, sun, air, and bugs and birds. Her book is filled with the resonances which come with looking at the world. How does one look at the world, and decide what of what is seen calls for report? There are pages on seeing muskrats, on how you have to dissolve yourself into pure act of perception before they are willing to appear. Well, the muskrats will be there year after year, but Annie Dillard will probably be mirroring other corners of the universe. So how she saw, instead of what, has priority:

> I have tried to show muskrats to other people, but it rarely works. No matter how quiet we are, the muskrats stay hidden. Maybe they sense the tense hum of human consciousness, the buzz from two human beings who in the silence cannot help but be aware of each other, and so of themselves. Then too, other people invariably suffer from a self-consciousness that prevents their stalking well. It used to bother me, too: I just could not bear to lose so much dignity that I would completely alter my whole way of being for a muskrat. So I would move or look around or scratch my nose, and no muskrats would show, leaving me alone with my dignity for days on end, until I decided that it was worth my while to learn—from the muskrats themselves—how to stalk.

What other way is there to learn? Is "forgetting yourself," one wonders, a learnable skill? Can a person become motiveless for a time, thus putting an end to bias? Call it the state of innocence, which is Annie Dillard's definition.

> What I call innocence is the spirit's unself-conscious state at any moment of pure devotion to any object. It is at once a receptiveness and a total concentration. One needn't be, shouldn't be, reduced to a puppy. If you wish to tell me that the city offers galleries, I'll pour you a drink and enjoy your company while it lasts; but I'll bear to my grave those pure moments at the Tate (was it the Tate?) where I stood planted, open-mouthed, born, before that one particular canvas, that river, up to my neck, gasping, lost, receding into watercolor depth and depth to the vanishing point, buoyant, awed, and had literally to be hauled away. These are our few live seasons. Let us live them as purely as we can, in the present.

Reading this book, you go from node to node. "Reviewing" would put up pretentious screens; savoring it in public is at least a possibility. The next node:

> Self-consciousness, however, does hinder the experience of the present. It is the one instrument that unplugs all the rest. So long as I lose myself in a tree, say, I can scent its leafy breath or estimate its board feet of lumber, I can draw its fruits or boil tea on its branches, and the tree stays tree. But the second I become aware of myself at any of these activities—looking over my shoulder, as it were—the tree vanishes, uprooted from the spot and flung out of

> sight as if it had never grown. And time, which had flowed down into the tree bearing new revelations like floating leaves at every moment, ceases. It dams, stills, stagnates.

No intermediaries, we said. This account comes from immediate experience, from being self-conscious and learning to *hinder* the psychic modifications which spring up when you see yourself seeing. This being wholly natural takes some doing.

> The effort is really a discipline requiring a lifetime of dedicated struggle; it marks the literature of saints and monks of every order East and West, under every rule and no rule, discalced and shod. The world's spiritual geniuses seem to discover universally that the mind's muddy river, this ceaseless flow of trivia and trash, cannot be dammed, and that trying to dam it is a waste of effort that might lead to madness. Instead you must allow the muddy river to flow unheeded in the dim channels of consciousness; you raise your sights; you look along it mildly, acknowledging its presence without interest and gazing beyond it into the realm of the real where subjects and objects act and rest purely, without utterance. . . .
>
> The secret of seeing is, then, the pearl of great price. If I thought he could teach me to find it and keep it forever I would stagger barefoot across a hundred deserts after any lunatic at all. But although the pearl may be found, it may not be sought. The literature of illumination reveals this above all: although it comes to those who wait for it, it is always, even to the most practiced and adept, a gift and a total surprise. I return from one walk knowing where the kildeer nests in the field by the creek and the hour the laurel blooms. I return from the same walk a day later scarcely knowing my own name. Litanies hum in my ears; my tongue flaps in my mouth Ailinon, alleluia! I cannot cause light, the most I can do is try to put myself in the path of its beam. It is possible, in deep space, to sail on solar wind. Light, be it particle or wave, has force: you rig a giant sail and go. The secret of seeing is to sail on solar wind. Hone and spread your spirit till you yourself are a sail, whetted, translucent, broadside to the merest puff.

Annie Dillard had a visual peak experience, and tells about it. A cedar tree filled every cell with light. It seems right to leave this passage for private reading, to save it from unframed exposure. Recurring glimpses of the tree—more, really, than memory—give her book its melodic form.

She confesses to the same purpose as Thoreau in writing:

> Like the bear who went over the mountain, I went out to see what I could see. And, I might as well warn you, like the bear, all that I could see was the other side of the mountain: more of the same. On a good day I might catch a glimpse of another wooded ridge rolling under the sun like water, another bivouac. I propose to keep here what Thoreau called "a meteorological journal of the mind," telling some tales and describing some of the sights of this rather tamed valley, and exploring, in fear and trembling, some of the unmapped dim reaches and unholy fastnesses to which those tales and sights so dizzyingly lead.
>
> I am no scientist. I explore the neighborhood. . .

Annie Dillard would not be much served by comparisons with other writers, even though, now and then, she calls some of them to mind. There is something about her prose which vivifies an almost forgotten passage in Poe: Sailing around in the universe—on a solar gale he blew up—he remarked to his companion of some distant celestial fireworks they saw flashing across the Zodiac—"I just thought that into being!" he said. So the reality of this book is the mind of its writer. It has the quality of a pantheistic paean, a hymn of adoration filled with nuances of bewilderment. Like Edward Bellamy, the writer is "greedy of infinity." Something goes on in this book that can never have a stop.

She is indeed like Thoreau. Both are hungrily eager. Yet both accept that man is only an unfinished thing, a someone who has a work to do. And they both know that completion is far away.

> Hasidism has a tradition that one of man's purposes is to assist God in the work of redemption by "hallowing" the things of creation. By a tremendous heave of his spirit, the devout man frees the divine spark trapped in the mute things of time, he uplifts the forms and moments of creation, bearing them aloft into that rare air and hallowing fire in which all

> days must shatter and burst. Keeping the subsoil world under trees in mind, in intelligence, is the *least* I can do.

"By a tremendous heave of his spirit"—now what is that? Well, you could say it is the Promethean act, act and sacrifice. Prometheus released into flame the divine spark trapped in human beings. It was—could become—either a hallowing or a destructive flame. *Demon est deus inversus.*

What is a "divine" spark? It is the fire of life that comes to self-awareness in man, and then is reduced to nervous glimmers by those storms Annie Dillard has written about, until, somehow, the secret of seeing is mastered and a blessed self-forgetfulness intervenes.

Who hallows—makes holy—the world? Who creates its sacred places, gives wonder to its vistas and octaves to its harmonies? These are all conceptual realities, and man is the conceptualizing intelligence in the universe. Man, then, is the promise of universal possibility, and he cannot forget it even in the darkest of his defeats. He keeps imagining a far-off victory.

Surely the gods are the graduates of an earlier humanity, who become the Promethean spirits of our world. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* is a celebration, not of the achievement, but the task.

COMMENTARY
THE UPANISHADS

SOME readers may not be acquainted with the *Upanishads,* to which Vinoba refers in passages quoted in this week's "Children." The Upanishads are a portion of the religious literature of India. According to tradition, there are one hundred and eight Upanishads. They are the concluding portions of the *Vedas* and contain discussions of ultimate philosophical questions. In a book of nearly a thousand pages, *The Principal Upanishads* (Allen and Unwin, 1953), Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan presents a number of them with a long, explanatory introduction. A literal rendering of "Upanishad" is "sit-down-near," which conveys the spirit of these texts. Radhakrishnan says:

> The Upanisads, though remote in time from us, are not remote in thought. They disclose the working of the primal impulses of the human soul which rise above the differences of race and of geographical position. At the core of all historical religions there are fundamental types of spiritual experience though they are expressed with different degrees of clarity. The Upanisads illustrate and illuminate these primary experiences. . . .
>
> When we pass from the Vedic hymns to the Upanisads we find that the interest shifts from the objective to the subjective, from the brooding on the wonder of the outside world to the meditation on the significance of the self. The human self contains the clue to the interpretation of nature.

It happens that the print shop which handles production for MANAS has published an exquisite translation of portions of the Upanishads, and we know of no better introduction to this treasury of Indian thought. The book is small, called *Selections from the Upanishads,* and in the same volume is printed a fine rendition (by Lionel Giles) of the *Tao Te King.* The book sells for $3.00 and may be ordered (add for shipping and tax) from The Cunningham Press, 3036 West Main Street, Alhambra, Calif. 91801.

The translator is Charles Johnston, a Theosophist and Sanskrit scholar who taught at Columbia University at the turn of the century. The following, from the *Katha Upanishad,* gives brief indication of its quality:

> The Self-Being pierced the opening outwards; hence one looks outward, not within himself. A wise man looks towards the Self with reverted sight, seeking deathlessness.
>
> Children seek after outward desires; they come to the net of widespread death. But the wise, beholding deathlessness, seek not for the enduring among unenduring things.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
VINOBA'S BASIC EDUCATION

WISDOM seems best embodied in aphorisms. Certainly the record of the world's wisdom is largely aphoristic. How do we recognize wisdom? Mainly by what happens to us when we think and brood over what is said. If a statement provokes the mind to analogues—if it drives us to illustrations and correspondences—the statement becomes an organizing principle of knowledge. Surely, wisdom lies in organizing principles, since they can be turned in every direction.

A second reading of Vinoba Bhave's "essay" on Basic Education—printed in *Resurgence* for January-February of this year—made the occasion for this comment. There is a seminal quality in what Vinoba says. It comes, we may think, both from what he is and from the material he uses. Since what a man is can hardly be spoken of, our comment will deal mostly with the materials.

First, a "dark saying":

> In the *Upanishads*, the praises of ignorance are sung side by side with the praises of knowledge. Man needs not only knowledge but ignorance too. Knowledge alone, or ignorance alone, leads him into darkness. But the union of fitting knowledge with fitting ignorance is the nectar of eternity. The world is so filled with the matter of knowledge that men would go mad if they were to attempt to cram all of it into their heads. The ability to forget is just as necessary to us as the ability to remember.

Well, what's good about "ignorance"? When you think about what you don't know, it becomes the road ahead, and the road is better than the inn. Without ignorance we should have no place to go, no reason to set out. Human life is inconceivable without the idea of expeditions. So, ignorance is the raw material of life. The supply of ignorance is probably infinite; so we shall always have somewhere to go. What then is knowledge? It enables a man to live in the world with balance, usefulness, and eagerness. It is not a quantitative thing.

Education, then, is concerned with people, not inventories of things. Vinoba focuses on fundamental questions:

> The question "What shall we teach our students?" is raised in the *Upanishads*, and the answer given is that we should teach them "the Veda of *Vedas."* We teach the *Vedas*, but omit the Bible; we teach the *Bible*, but omit the *Quran* we teach the *Quran*, but omit the *Dhammapada;* we teach the *Dhammapada* but omit science; we teach science but omit political economy. Where are we to stop? No, we have to give them instead the Veda of *Vedas*, that is to say, the power to study the *Vedas*, and everything else for themselves. We have to put into their hands the key to knowledge.

What does he mean by the "Veda of *Vedas"? Vedas* are symbols of the last word in knowledge—the source of it all. You can't really say anything about such knowledge; illustrations have to be in relative terms. One illustration would be John Holt's letter to a girl he used to teach, now in college, who wrote him enviously saying that *he* had "everything taped." He told her:

> "You could not possibly be more mistaken. The difference between you and me is not that I have everything all taped, it's that I know I don't and I never will, I don't expect to and don't need to. I expect to live my entire life about as ignorant and uncertain and confused as I am now and I have learned to live with this, not to worry about it. I have learned to swim in uncertainty the way a fish swims in water.

This is John Holt's oblique "praise of ignorance." He may sound as though he is *settling* for ignorance, but instead he is making a sensible and workable definition of knowledge. Like some others in the same field, Holt has a very hungry mind. You can say this because his work is alive with his imagination, and only people who keep on learning preserve lively imaginations. So, even if you can't put your finger on what he knows, you know it's there.

All this is pretty recondite or sublime. Vinoba also deals with the mundane:

> The school-society must be a model of the future society. Let us suppose there are five to ten teachers, with ten to twenty other members of their families. There are sixty to eighty children—altogether a hundred people or so. They should have tools to work with, land to grow crops, whatever books they need and other equipment provided by society. Then say to them: "Earn your living and carry on your education at the same time."

Objections will be heard. We can't do that! You want us to *move?* Why don't you make a *practical* suggestion? Well, that is like saying, "Give us a more *comfortable* law of nature."

Further "mundane" material from Vinoba:

> Teaching must take place in the context of real life. Set the children to work in the fields, and when a problem arises there give them whatever knowledge of cosmogony or physics, or any other science, is needed to solve it. Set them to cook a meal, and as need arises teach them chemistry. In one word, let them live. The children should have someone with them, but that someone should not belong to a special category called teacher, he should be a man living an ordinary life in the practical world. The man who is to guide children should conduct his life intelligently and be capable of explaining the processes of life and work to the children as opportunity arises. It is not education to fill students' heads with information, but to arouse their thirst for knowledge. Teacher and pupil both learn by their contact with each other. Both are students. True education is that which is experienced, tasted and digested. What can be counted and recorded is not education. Education cannot be doled out; it cannot be weighed and measured.

The schools as they now are are certainly no means of changing the world. You have to be independent to exercise an influence for constructive change, and the schools are *not* independent. They are also artificial in their relation to life. Vinoba says:

> Throughout the world education is under the control of governments. This is extremely dangerous. Governments ought to have no authority over education. The work of education should be in the hands of men of wisdom, but Governments have got it in their grasp; every student in the country has to study whatever book is prescribed by the Education Department. . . .
>
> We in India used to hold to the principle that education should be completely free from state control. . . . The king had absolutely no power to control education. The consequence was that Sanskrit literature achieved a degree of freedom of thought such as can be seen nowhere else. . .

A great writer, Solzhenitsyn said, is a "second government." The same might be said of the sort of education Vinoba is talking about. It would shape men and women under the rules of freedom and of independent thought. Or, more accurately, it would make it possible for them to shape themselves. What then would be the role of teachers?

> The teacher in the school should be the inspiration of the whole town, and the school should be the center of service. If the community needs medicine, it should be supplied through the school. If the streets need cleaning, the school should initiate the work. The people should turn to the teacher to help them settle disputes. The school should make plans for the observance of festivals. In this way the school should become the center of the community; it should develop whatever is of value and introduce the things that are lacking.

Who does this, now, in our towns? The local board of realtors, maybe? The Chamber of Commerce? Not always. Some schools do such things now and then. There should be more such schools, and independent of officialdom.

> Even in higher education students should work six hours a day to earn their bread and should be taught, in two hours a day, all the knowledge and science that relates to their work. There should be no cost either to the school or the parents, and rich and poor should be treated alike. . . . There must be economic self-reliance through manual labor. Everyone must learn how to use his hands. If the whole population were to take up some kind of handicraft, it would bring all sorts of benefits; class divisions would be overcome, production would rise, prosperity and health would improve. So that, at the very least, this measure of self-sufficiency must form part of our educational programme.

Putting such a program into effect would involve us in numerous difficulties. Ah, yes. We're not really geared for it. But what *are* we geared for, educationally speaking?

FRONTIERS

A Step-by-Step Process

THE paradigm shift, the therapeutic leap, the return of the prodigal son—has already happened, and the long, slow, and desperately needed process of rationalization, of developing its logic and filling in the blanks is now in full swing. Paradigm shift to what? To the holistic, ecological, morally self-conscious point of view in human life. Ostensibly, the change has been provoked by pain. But pain alone leads to flight, withdrawal, or to the false remedies of neurosis. Vision was at the root of the change—the vision of men like Tolstoy and Gandhi, of Mumford and Polanyi, of Roszak and Schumacher, of Albert Howard and Rachel Carson.

Rationalization is a step-by-step process which, as it goes along, gathers strength, multiplies insight, and finally makes the uncommon sense of the paradigm shift irresistible. Even commerce and industry will finally decide to go along, and last, of course, government.

A sign on the frontiers of change: Lawrence Kohlberg's letter in the *New York Times Book Review* of March 24, commenting critically on Stanley Milgram's book, *Obedience to Authority*. In this book Milgram tells how ordinary people can be caused to inflict pain on the human subjects of scientific experiment. Whatever may have been "learned" from this demonstration of human submissiveness to authority, moral degradation of those involved was the result, Kohlberg says. The experiment should have been stopped or altered, and he, Kohlberg, is now ashamed that he didn't try to persuade Milgram to adopt another approach, since he was present as an observer. "Not the idols of the academy, but the development of moral philosophic tendencies inherent in man are the solutions to the problem." The new principle that is emerging: Ethics is the queen of the sciences.

Another good sign is publication of an article by E. F. Schumacher in the *Nation* for April 6: "Night Thoughts about Progress." The facts of planetary ecology are in—and available in books like *Limits to Growth* and *Blueprint for Survival*—the problem now being to see their meaning and to change our ways. After hours the businessman who has been working all day for growth and expansion "finds himself bombarded by urgent appeals to limit growth and by prophecies of doom, breakdown of civilization, ecological disaster and exhaustion of resources." The message is beginning to get through to him; it got through to the young some ten years ago, and they are wildly experimenting with alternatives.

The myths of the past remain powerful, but alternativescan be made to work, although, so far, only in the "developing countries." Schumacher writes about what people can do to begin changes of their own, helping to "design a survival technology which will amplify life instead of leading straight into ecological disaster." Schumacher seems uniquely qualified to persuade and energize his readers.

Another sign: Instead of bragging about the "knowledge explosion," Sen. Gaylord Nelson (Wisc.) declared recently (*Congressional Record*, March 31) that the energy crisis showed that there is vast ignorance about natural resources and little fundamental information for decision-makers. Twenty-two years ago the Paley Commission warned that no one was keeping track of such matters, but nothing was done about this lack. Nelson gives a lot of figures on present shortages of essential minerals, and notes in relation to world food supply that rising prices will soon bring inevitable hunger to the large portion of mankind which already spends 80 per cent of its income on food.

Crucial to the spread of understanding of what is happening in relation to energy production and consumption is a paper by Howard T. Odum, who teaches ecology at the University of Florida. It appears in the first issue of *CoEvolution Quarterly*, successor to the *Whole Earth Catalog*, published at Box 428, Sausalito, Calif. 94965 ($6

a year). Odum's paper requires some study, but no expertise for understanding it. The main point is that in the hope of getting more energy to be able to go on living the way we do now, we are spending too much of the energy we still have available. In short, we are *wasting* energy on increasingly costly ways of producing it.

Prof. Odum makes equations (diagrammed) to show how two fundamental economic systems function. One is based on growth, the other is a steady-state system. When growth is no longer possible by reason of diminishing or exhausted natural resources, it becomes necessary to change to a steady-state or "no-growth" sort of economic metabolism. This necessity has to be understood before it will be accepted. Odum makes this understanding pretty clear. His analysis needs first-hand attention; here are some incidental comments:

> During growth, emphasis is on competition, and large differences in economic and energetic welfare develop, competitive exclusion, instability, poverty, and unequal wealth are characteristic. During steady state, competition is controlled and eliminated, being replaced with regulatory systems, high division and diversity of labor, uniform energy distributions, little change and growth only for replacement purposes. Love of stable system quality replaces love of net gain. Religious ethics adopt something closer to that of those primitive peoples that were formerly dominant in zones of the world with cultures based on the steady energy flows from the sun. Socialistic ideals about distribution are more consistent with steady state than with growth.

On development of new energy sources:

> Many forms of energy are low grade because they have to be concentrated, transported, dug from deep in the earth or pumped from far at sea. Much energy has to be used directly and indirectly to support machinery, people, supply systems, etc., to deliver the energy. If it takes ten units of energy to bring ten units of energy to the point of use, then there is *no* net energy.

Optimism supposing that technological genius will keep us going as we are now usually ignores this simple arithmetic. The energy cost of nuclear construction is high: "Should we use the last of our rich fossil fuel wealth for the high research and development costs and high capital investments of processes too late to develop a net yield?"

Excessive growth not only destroys its own roots but threatens the natural succession to a steady-state balance:

> For example, areas that grow too dense with urban developments may pave over areas that formerly accepted and reprocessed waste waters. As a consequence, special tertiary waste treatments become necessary and monetary and energy drains are diverted from useful works to works that were formerly supplied free. . . . Man as a partner of nature must use nature well and this does not mean crowd it out and pave it over; nor does it mean developing industries that compete with nature for waters and wastes that would be an energy contributor to the survival of both.

This sort of cogent explanation of the implications of ecological first principles needs wide circulation, to the point where inventive adaptation to change is recognized as the only remaining option. *CoEvolution* should be useful in this way. (Incidentally, Vinoba Bhave's paper on "Revolution" is in this first issue of *CoEvolution*, and it, too, should have more circulation.)