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WHAT IS HUMANISM?

AN interchange between an author and a critic in *Environment* for last October sets the stage for inquiry into the origins of Humanism. Philosophical movements are usually altered by being taken up by large numbers of people, and Humanism is no exception. The *Environment* reviewer quotes from *The Arrogance of Humanism* by David Ehrenfeld, in which the writer declares the flaw of Humanism to be "a supreme faith in human reason—its ability to confront and solve the many problems humans face." He continues:

> Humanism places its faith in humankind, so that for the continuing worsening human misery . . . it has no satisfactory explanation, only excuses, lies, evasions, and utopian promises.

The reviewer, Alan Miller, comments:

> The unanswered question, of course, which the author does little to answer, is "where else but in humankind can we place our trust?"

Apparently, the book blames Humanism for all the offenses of modern society—its ruthless assault on the environment, its misuse of technology, its polluting activities, the failure of its bureaucratic organizations, and the ineffectuality of its political forms, both right and left. The author, we learn, calls for "a gentler and more humble approach to the environment," and he seems to feel that he must label himself an "anti-humanist" in order to affirm this view.

Well, what is Humanism? According to the eleventh edition of the *Britannica*—

> The term is specially applied to that movement of thought which in western Europe in the 15th century broke through the medieval traditions of scholastic theology and philosophy and devoted itself to the rediscovery and direct study of ancient classics. This movement was essentially a revolt against intellectual, and especially ecclesiastical authority, and is the parent of all modern developments whether intellectual, scientific or social.

The first humanists were by no means mere antiquarians. They began as reformers of religion, using ancient philosophers as sources of material for their work. The best single spokesman of Humanism at its start was probably Pico della Mirandola (born 1463), an Italian prince who at an early age (he died at thirty-one) knew not only Latin and Greek but had mastered Hebrew, Chaldee and Arabic. He drew on Plato, the Neoplatonists, the Hermetic books and the Kabbala to deepen and illuminate Christian doctrine, and in 1486—he was then twenty-three—he offered for disputation with the doctors of the Church a list of nine hundred questions. This debate was not permitted by the Pope, because of heresies found implicit in his questions, so Pico published only their introduction, which is his famous *Oration on the Dignity of Man.*

Humanism is often said to include any view which is concerned with human welfare, but this mushy definition loses sight of the strength of the original conception as given by Pico, which is a position taken on the nature of man. The *dignity* of man, according to Pico, rests in his freedom, his capacity and need to direct and shape his own life. This idea is presented early in the *Oration,* in an allegory of Creation. The Great Artificer finds that all the archetypes had been used up on animal creation, when, finally, he came to the design of Man. But Deity is not without resource:

> Taking man, therefore, this creature of indeterminate image, He set him in the middle of the world and thus spoke to him:
>
> "We have given you, Oh Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor any endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgment and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no

> such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine."

Man was bestowed with the germs of every possibility, to make of them what he would.

> Who then will not look with awe upon this our chameleon, or who, at least, will look with greater admiration on any other being? This creature, man, whom Asclepius the Athenian, by reason of this very mutability, this nature capable of transforming itself, quite rightly said was symbolized in the mysteries by the figure of Proteus. This is the source of those metamorphoses, or transformations, so celebrated among the Hebrews and among the Pythagoreans; for even the esoteric theology of the Hebrews at times transforms the holy Enoch into that angel of divinity which is sometimes called *"malakh-ha-shekhinah"* and at other times transforms other personages into divinities of other names; while the Pythagoreans transform men guilty of crimes into brutes or even, if we are to believe Empedocles, into plants and Mohamet, imitating them, was known frequently to say that the man who deserts the divine law becomes a brute. And he was right; for it is not the bark that makes the tree but its insensitive and unresponsive nature, nor the hide which makes the beast of burden, but its brute and sensual soul; nor the orbicular form which makes the heavens, but their harmonious order. Finally, it is not freedom from a body, but its spiritual intelligence, which makes the angel. If you see a man dedicated to his stomach, crawling on the ground, you see a plant and not a man: or if you see a man bedazzled by the empty forms of the imagination, as by the wiles of Calypso, and through their alluring solicitations made a slave to his own senses, you see a brute and not a man. If, however, you see a philosopher, judging and distinguishing all things according to the rule of reason, him shall you hold in veneration, for he is a creature of heaven and not of earth; if, finally, a pure contemplator, unmindful of the body, wholly withdrawn into the inner chambers of the mind, here indeed is neither a creature of earth nor a heavenly creature, but some higher divinity, clothed with human flesh.

The man celebrated by Pico is both self-created and unfinished; he has freedom either to raise himself above the angels or reduce himself below the beasts. Whatever we may make of the imagery of his discourse, Pico's conception of man gives an acceptable account of the duality of human nature. The human has both godlike and demoniacal potentialities. And he is responsible for the direction in which he goes.

The heart of classical Humanism, then, is this joint principle of freedom and responsible self-reliance in the nature of man. Man is no sinful worm, but a potential divinity. In the century after Pico would come the beginning of another great transformation in human thought—the discovery by Copernicus of the heliocentric system. The demonstration of the Copernican theory changed the human understanding of nature, mainly through the influence of two notable champions: Giordano Bruno and Galileo. This was the genesis of modern science, another great event which took place in the matrix of ancient philosophy.

Science progressively transformed our conception of the natural world. Writing of this far-reaching historical change, Ernst Cassirer says (in *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*):

> The extent of these influences seems almost immeasurable and yet it does not fully indicate the formative force which originated in natural science. The real achievement of science lies elsewhere; it is not so much in the new objective content which science has made accessible to the human mind as in the new function which it attributes to the mind of man. The knowledge of nature does not simply lead us out into the world of objects; it serves rather as a medium in which the mind develops its own self-knowledge. A process is thus initiated which is more significant than all increase and extension of the mere material with which newly awakened natural science has enriched human knowledge.

The part played by Galileo in this alteration of outlook is well known. His great offense, for

which he was duly punished by the Church, was that he proclaimed that through the practice of science men could find out truths about the world without the aid of Revelation. His written work was a declaration of independence for scientific inquiry. Bruno's declaration had even deeper significance—humanistic significance. Cassirer says:

> The highest energy and deepest truth of the mind do not consist in going out to the infinite, but in the mind's maintaining itself against the infinite and proving in its pure unity equal to the infinity of being. Giordano Bruno, in whom this new climate of opinion first appears, defines the relation between the ego and the world, between subject and object in this sense. For him the infinite process of becoming, the great spectacle of the world forever unrolling before our eyes, is the guaranty of that deepest meaning which the ego can find only in itself. . . .
>
> Nature is more than mere creation; it participates in original divine essence because the divine power pervades nature itself. The dualism between creator and creation is thus abolished. Nature as that which is moved is no longer set over against the divine mover; it is now an original formative principle which moves from within. Through its capacity to unfold and take on form from within itself, nature bears the stamp of the divine. For God is not to be conceived as a force intervening from without and exerting its influence as a moving cause on matter foreign to itself, God Himself enters directly into the process of nature. Such a "presence" is appropriate to the divine and is alone worthy of its dignity. "God is not an external intelligence rolling around and leading around; it is more worthy for him to be the internal principle of motion, which is his own nature, his own appearance, his own soul than that as many entities as live in His bosom should have motion." A radical transformation of the concept of nature appears in these words of Giordano Bruno. Nature is elevated to the sphere of the divine and seems to be resolved into the infinity of the divine nature, but on the other hand it implies the individuality, the independence and particularity of objects. And from this characteristic force, which radiates from every object as a special center of activity, is derived also the inalienable worth which belongs to it in the totality of being. All this is now summed up in the word "nature," which signifies the integration of all parts into one all-inclusive whole of activity and life which, nevertheless, no longer means mere subordination. For the part not only exists within the whole but asserts itself against it, constituting a specific element of individuality and necessity. The law which governs individual entities is not prescribed by a foreign law-giver, nor thrust upon them by force; it is founded in, and completely knowable through, their own nature.

From Bruno we have a pantheist God and an evolving universe. Ernst Cassirer devotes many pages of his book to this original spirit of the Enlightenment, which, he says, "is permeated by genuine creative feeling and an unquestionable faith in the reformation of the world." He distills the inspiring religious philosophy of the time, as found in leading thinkers:

> No form or name can express the absolute being of God, for form and name are modes of limitation and hence are incommensurable with the nature of the infinite. But the reverse of this is also implied. Since all particular forms are equally remote from the nature of the Absolute, they are also equally near it. Every expression of the divine, in so far as it is in itself genuine and true, may be compared with every other; they are equivalent so long as they do not pretend to express that being itself but merely to indicate it in a parable or a symbol. The growth and constant intensification of this humanistic religious spirit can be traced from Nicholas of Cusa to Marsilio Ficino, and from Ficino to Erasmus and Thomas More. . . . The problem of the reconciliation of man and God, with whose solution the great scholastic systems and all medieval mysticism had wrestled, appeared now in a new light. This reconciliation was no longer looked for exclusively in an act of divine grace; it was supposed to take place amid the activity of the human spirit and its processes of self-development.

Needless to say, the Fathers of the Protestant Reformation would have none of this humanist philosophy of religious independence. Luther condemned it utterly because it suggested that man "can do something for his own salvation," and later, in England, Ralph Cudworth and Henry More, the seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonists, were unable to stem the tide of Puritanism and orthodox Calvinism. The doctrine of Original Sin, which no real humanist could accept, remained the central dogma of the time,

until, in the eighteenth century, valiant atheists such as D'Holbach and De Lamettrie decided that only a complete break with every sort of religion would free the minds of men from the mental and bodily oppressions of priestcraft. This aggressive materialism of the Revolutionary period became the intellectual orthdoxy of the nineteenth century, which was strongly reinforced by Darwin, and given further support in the twentieth century by Freud and Marx.

There is nothing in materialistic doctrine to inspire the discipline of self-restraint. In this case the human is wholly identified with his body, and the body lives by appetites. The branch of humanism—if it is humanism—which embraces the skepticism of science regarding a higher nature in man—the presence in him of moral or spiritual intelligence—can hardly advocate self-control by the individual save on social grounds, and this means, except under some sort of totalitarian control by the state, the reduction of morality to a personal calculus of private versus social interest. The private interest usually dominates.

It follows that the humanism under indictment today is reduced and denatured humanism in contrast with the affirmations of the founders of humanist thought such as Pico and Bruno. For true representatives of humanism in our own time, we have to make a careful selection from among a few distinguished individuals. Irving Babbitt, who died in 1935, might be one, and Robert M. Hutchins another. Maslow and Schumacher are two more who should be named. Interestingly, Babbitt's last work, posthumously published in 1936 (Oxford University Press), was a translation of the Buddhist classic, the *Dhammapada*, together with an essay, "Buddha and the Occident." In the latter his discussion of the "supernatural" element in Buddhism is of particular interest (remembering the dominance of materialistic thinking at that time):

> One is justified in asserting on other than thaumaturgical grounds that the genuine teaching of Buddha is steeped in the supernatural. According to the tradition, when Buddha begged his way through the streets of his native town, his father, King Suddhodana, demurred, whereupon Buddha said that he was merely following the practice of all his race. When the King protested that no one of his race had ever been a mendicant, Buddha replied that he referred, not to his earthly lineage, but to the race of the Buddhas. As a matter of fact, what is specifically supernatural, not merely in the Buddhas but in other religious teachers, for example in St. Francis, is their achievement of certain virtues.

Irving Babbitt adds a Buddhist anecdote on the question of the attainment of the Buddha as a liberated human:

> A certain Buddhist recluse, we are told, being puzzled by a knotty point of doctrine and finding no mortal who could solve his difficulty, at last by appropriate meditations mounted from heaven to heaven but was still unable to discover any one who could enlighten him. Finally he came to the paradise of Brahma, and propounded the question to the divinity himself. Brahma said, "I am Brahma, the Supreme Being, the Omniscient and Unsurpassed," etc. "I did not ask you," replied the recluse, "whether you were Brahma, the Supreme Being, the Omniscient, the Unsurpassed, but whether you could answer my question." Whereupon Brahma took him to one side and explained that the angels of his retinue thought him omniscient, but that in fact no one could give the desired enlightenment save Buddha.

Does this imply immodesty in Buddha? Babbitt says:

> What one is able to affirm without going beyond immediate experience and falling into dogma is, in Arnold's phrase, a great power not ourselves that makes for righteousness, a phrase that reminds one of Buddha's conception of the *dhamma,* or human law, as one may render it, in contradiction to the law of physical nature. Not being able to find any personality human or divine superior to his own, Buddha got his humility, as he himself tells us, by looking up to the Law.

At the end of this essay by a modern classical humanist there is this contrast between the Buddha's outlook and the views of certain present-day psychologists:

> As is well known, the more thorough-going naturalists have been tending more and more to discard speculative philosophy in favour of

> psychology; and herein they are at one with Buddha. One is conscious, however, of some underlying discrepancy between Buddha and the naturalistic psychologists. . . . If in his total position he seems so widely removed from both psychoanalyst and behaviourist, the explanation is that he affirms as a matter of immediate perception a principle of control in man that all schools of naturalistic psychology deny in favour of some form of monism. If the quality of will proclaimed by Buddha and other religious teachers is a fact, it is plainly a fact of overwhelming importance: so much so that any view of life that fails to reckon with it will finally turn out to be nugatory. If one affirms that man is what he does and then, like the behaviourist, conceives of doing merely in terms of reactions to outer stimuli, the result is a monstrous mutilation of human nature. A similar failure to take account of the higher will vitiates the psychoanalytical idea of adjustment. . . .
>
> In general, there is irreconcilable opposition between Buddhism and any philosophy or psychology ancient or modern, that tends, on any grounds whatsoever, to obscure the truths of the higher will.

On the showing of its sources, then, the title of Humanism ought to be withheld from any school of thought or way of life that denies or ignores the reality of this higher will.

REVIEW
BODY AND SOUL

Let the Patient Decide—A Doctor's Advice to Older Persons (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1978, 156 pages, $4.95), by Louis Shattuck Baer, M.D.

A MORE tatting title for this little book might have been "The Patient *Must* Decide!", with as subtitle the heading the writer used for Part 2—"Ways To Avoid Dying in a Nursing Home."

Dr. Baer's major thesis is quite simply that each one of us must deliberately free himself from bondage to the three M's: Modern Miracle Medicine, by overcoming fear of death and our current custom which surrounds the subject of death and dying with a social taboo. We *can* do this, and Dr. Baer suggests how. The question each of us faces, of course, is *will* we do so?

A man of sixty-odd, with forty years as an active general practitioner behind him, Dr. Baer illustrates his thesis with sound reasoning, a plentiful supply of facts, and fascinating if sometimes gruesome case histories from his long experience. There are no villains in Dr. Baer's view, though he names many gremlins: our unwillingness to think and to talk about death and dying; the pressures on medical people from family, from the law, from—and this is no joke—sheer humanity; the medical compulsion to keep life going by every means possible; and a socially approved and usually religiously or philosophically based insistence that life is the "greatest gift of the Creator," and that "biological existence" must be maintained at any cost.

The crux of the matter is again quite simple. Fifty or so years ago most of us now older persons would have died quietly, naturally, at home, since medicines and treatments for the great killers of the elderly were not then known. Now, miracle drugs and procedures can keep bodies alive, far beyond usefulness to ourselves, to our families, or to society. And the price we pay for that body kept alive, after the mind is gone, is maybe months or even years of existing without dignity or purpose, at great financial expense, in a nursing home.

A patient of any age, in these times, faces problems: a feeling of ignorance, for example; pain and fear; the normal belief that the doctor knows best; the idea that hospitals are dedicated to curing patients; and a natural human tendency to prefer to go on living. All these conceptions represent some degree of truth, but Dr. Baer suggests that we, especially older patients, examine them with some care. Ignorant we may be, in the face of the current explosion of technical medical discovery, but, says Dr. Baer, it is the responsibility and the privilege of each of us to learn to control his own life—and his own death, which is part of life.

He insists, quite soberly, that it is never too late to start. Even in cases where pain and fear of death are present, there are ways of coping if we first face the problems. And the physician, says Dr. Baer, though he be ever so well versed in modern scientific medicine, does *not* always know what is best for each human being in his care. An informed and thoughtful patient *can* find out, if he chooses.

What about hospitals? Dr. Baer appreciates modern equipment, deeply respects the skills and devotion of fine hospital personnel, but one of his comments is clearly a shocker: "It seems," he says, "that sometimes on an intensive care unit the purpose is to utilize the machines."

Dr. Baer addresses himself gently but insistently to the older patient. While medicine occasionally works seeming miracles with young bodies, it is far less successful with older ones. One of his most startling statements relates to the resuscitative efforts which are standard and required procedures in coronary care:

> I believe that 80% . . . are total failures. The patient dies. . . . Somewhere between 5% and 10% of the attempts are variably successful. The patients make fair, good, or excellent recoveries following what would have been certain death. *On the other hand* 5% to 10% of the efforts only prolong the act of

> dying for minutes, hours, days, weeks, or months. The decision is yours to make. [Italics added.]

Dr. Baer has pithily similar summations for the heroic modern treatments of the other great ailments of the elderly—strokes and cancer.

Finally, in a chapter, "The Patient Gives the Orders," he insists that only if your doctor knows your wishes can he use the gifts of modern medical science for your greatest benefit. In recent years, the law has begun coming to the patient's aid by the passage of what are called Right-to-Die laws. California is one of the foremost in these. More than 500,000 Americans have made use of The Living Will, a statement of intention and instruction to medical personnel, to family, friends, legal advisor, anyone who may be concerned. But the initiative rests inexorably in the hands of the patient, and he must act on it well before he becomes seriously ill and no longer able to make his wishes known.

To those of us who have undergone the trauma of helplessly watching a loved one or a friend slowly wasting away in a nursing home, deprived of all dignity, in great mental discomfort or outright physical pain, for longer or shorter periods unaware or even comatose, the challenge to plan our own deaths is sharp and clear. Dr. Baer's little book is a good starting-point for the effort.

PAUL B. JOHNSON

A passage from *You Are Not Alone* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1976) by Clara Claiborne Park and Leon Shapiro, M.D., will link this book on mental illness with Dr. Baer's case for decisions by patients. *You Are Not Alone* is a guide for the general reader. When trouble of this sort comes, it may be sudden or unexpected. The book tells you what you can do and how to go about it. Clara Park knows from personal experience what dealing with mental ills is like—she raised an autistic daughter. "It was because of Wily," she says, "that I wanted to write this book." Her intention of being really helpful comes through on every page. In a chapter headed "Outrage—How To Use It" she writes about the problems of old people:

> Hundreds of papers are presented at a typical meeting of the American Psychiatric Association; if one or two are concerned with *geriatric psychiatry*—the psychiatry of the aging—that's a lot. "At one discussion on the aged," writes Dr. Paul Poinsard, "only ten doctors showed up out of the 7000 attending the convention." Psychiatrists who serve the aging are angry, dedicated, and few. Writes one of them, Dr. Eric Pfeiffer of Duke University Medical School, "while it might be reasonable to assume that the care of the emotionally distressed, disturbed, or disturbing aged should be primarily the responsibility of psychiatrically trained physicians, the actual facts are quite otherwise." The actual facts, another tells us, are that medical students refer to elderly patients as old crocks and raw young interns address them by their first names, and that mental health professionals who choose to work with old people do so in the face of "the often heard professional opinion that an interest in aging represents a morbid preoccupation with decline and death." As we've seen, doctors like to cure people. Chronic patients are never popular, and old age is the most chronic of conditions. Psychiatrists also note the problem of "counter-transference," when mental health professionals transfer to their patients responses more appropriate to relationships out of their own personal lives. In Dr. Poinsard's words, "The physician's (and not only the physician's) security may be threatened by hostile feelings against his own parents, by the reminder of death in the aged, and by feelings of helplessness."

There is ire in this book, but happily much more. Not only are all the major mental afflictions discussed from the viewpoint of what can be done to save or help, but there is much insight into characteristic problems. The reader is enabled to enter the mind of the sick person and feel something of what he feels.

COMMENTARY
"AT THE BASE OF ALL FAITHS"

A VALUE in *You Are Not Alone,* unnoted in this week's Review, is the extensive quotation from persons afflicted by mental illness. Van Gogh, for one, saw and heard things that "weren't there," and knowledge of his ill comforted him:

> That lessens the horror that I retained at first of the attack I have had, and when it comes on you unawares, cannot but frighten you without measure. Once you know it is part of the disease, you take it like anything else. If I had not seen other lunatics close up, I should not have been able to free myself from dwelling on it constantly. For the anguish and suffering are no joke once you are caught in the attack. . . . Rey told me that he had seen a case where someone had mutilated his own ear, as I did. . . . I really think that once you are conscious of your condition and of being subject to attack, then you can do something yourself to prevent your being taken unawares by the suffering or the terror.

The best way to convey the value of this book is to give a closing passage in the introduction:

> First over years, then faster, families of the mentally ill have found each other, worked together, have built organizations, have discovered for the searching a growing host of friends among professionals, friends who were ready to respect our pain and anger, even some of them, to share it. In the not yet ten years since I first wrote Wily's story, I—we—have watched a whole profession opening up, a growing reluctance to point so readily to families as prime causers of harms whose causes nobody can yet know. We have seen the growth of a new confidence in the possibilities of fundamental research into the biology that underlies the mysteries of the brain and the emotions, and into the efficacy of the treatments offered when the mind and the emotions go wrong. We have seen the rise of new treatments—not panaceas, but workable ways to teach and restore, and we have seen the improvement of old ones. We have seen the growth of an idea unheard of when Wily and our family began our lifelong journey together, the idea that families can share in the treatment of their ill member as true co-therapists, the necessary accompaniment to another new idea, that the mentally ill can live and be helped and often get well in their own communities. . . .
>
> Caught up in enthusiasm, we might almost find ourselves saying that using pain can make you forget it, except that it can't and doesn't. But it can help us toward what we—what I—need most of all. The faith at the base of all faiths—as of so many therapies—is the conviction that we do not suffer at random, but that what happens to us has meaning. For me, the strength of that faith is Wily's gift.

This is the feeling which pervades a comprehensively practical book.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
CHANGES OF TASTE

ONE day a week we come to the office armed with material set aside for "Children." Some of this material we have had for weeks, because the morning's mail often changes our plans. Today, for example, we have a note from a new reader, Elizabeth Poisson, in New England, enclosing something she wrote for a class in "expository writing." Then, another reader has sent us the response of an English friend to the "International Year of the Child."

First the material from New England, which might be titled "More with Less," after either Buckminster Fuller or E. F. Schumacher or both.

* * *

Doing more with less. It is a way of life I've been learning for the past four years. Simplicity is its synonym, in thought, action and possession. Working on possession has helped me with the rest.

Although I enjoy reading about people in history who have followed this path it has always seemed distant and academic. Meeting Chuck brought it all to life.

He is one of the more radiant human beings I have encountered. He lives in Wellfleet in a yurt (a Mongolian round hut). He built it himself. He is self-sufficient in his simplicity.

He farms a tiny organic garden. He works as a commercial fisherman. He earns $3,000 a year. He is well fed by the land and sea. His clothing is practical. A bike serves as transportation. A well provides water. Gas lamps give light. A wood stove furnishes heat.

A deepening commitment to my own form of simplicity grew after meeting and learning from Chuck.

When I was a child we did with what we had. Why did I forget this for a while? One trip in a VW beetle moved me to Boston. Glancing around the apartment I see a trucking company coming to expedite the next move.

Why did I become the mad consumer? Why did I let the sirens of material possession beckon me? What useful knowledge has been learned with all this acquisition?

Do we own the things or do they own us? Does one need to be reminded in a concrete fashion that thousands of miles have been logged in and around the world? Or can't it all be contained within oneself? Do my living quarters need to have the look of a travel agency or museum?

Parting with old treasures brings joy. It's liberating. Nothing that has left has been missed. The trinkets are scattered throughout my friends' homes. Is this fair? To unclutter one life only to clutter another? Maybe I'm fulfilling a need they have.

Thoughts about burning the paraphernalia filter through my mind in moments on the edge of sanity. Unfortunately that seems all too cavalier.

Another consideration for the excess is the yard sale. Then the question forms, does one charge to get rid of things?

What about the handmade gifts lovingly given by family and friends? They are treasures that still remain. The articles easily purged are those which were purchased or collected without much forethought.

Asceticism is not the path here. Hopefully a scaling down is the outcome. An exchange of a superhighway cluttered with goods for a windy road filled with people and the beauty of the natural world. It is a matter of priorities. A conscious decision to simplify. The Japanese are masters of creating beauty with spare decoration.

The first step was the hardest, a familiar refrain. Each year this theme of simplicity leads to new areas. A richer awareness has developed in the world of food and clothing.

Doing more with less. The less one needs, the less one worries. For me, less has become more.

* * *

"A Change of Taste" would be a better title for this report. For more on this subject, one might turn to Harlan Hubbard's *Payne Hollow* (Eakins) which, as we once said, "is like eating a piece of home-made bread."

The musings on the Year of the Child are by Robin Tanner, of Oxfordshire. They also are an expression of taste, in the strongest and best sense of the word, done in a charming calligraphy we cannot, alas, reproduce here.

* * *

In my Edwardian childhood England was very beautiful, and over the elmy countryside there was a deep peace and a quality of silence that have now almost left the world. In Oxford you could saunter across Carfax or down the High, meeting only perhaps a covered baker's van or a farm cart or a fly bearing a don or a student from the station to his college.

The sleepy schools had narrow aims, and the achievement of children was correspondingly meagre. The earth was raped of its resources unquestioningly, and life seemed safe and immutable. In foreign parts white people exploited black, and at home the rich lived on the poor. Words and phrases common today were then unknown: pollution, computer, radio-active, conservation, plutonium, re-cycling, the 3rd World, nuclear, and many more.

A cruel, unnecessary war put an end to that world, and some twenty years later came one with worse consequences, for now science and technology ruled.

It is a sad thought that throughout this century there has been only one year—I believe it was 1926 or 27—when no war was being waged anywhere in the world.—And more than half the ten million refugees roaming the earth today are young children.

Safety and the certainty of any possible future for children become more and more remote. Yet as the clouds darken there comes some noble prompting that causes the United Nations to establish the International Year of the Child we are celebrating today. Is it our sense of guilt at our betrayal of children that makes us do this? And even leads us to enumerate their basic human rights? You may remember that the final Principle in the United Nations Declaration of The Rights of The Child ends with this assertion:

> He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance and friendship among peoples, universal brotherhood, and PEACE.

Are we but paying lip service to these ideas, so that the International Year of the Child becomes a mere travesty? Is it not time that we looked at this world not as something we have inherited from our parents but as something we have borrowed from our children?

How I wish I could proudly say I belong to a country that has rejected Nuclear Energy and renounced Nuclear Arms! We should be the admiration and envy of the world, and the safest and richest country too. But instead we are faced with a terrible spectre.

Six years ago Schumacher wrote in *Small Is Beautiful:*

> No degree of prosperity could justify the accumulation of huge amounts of highly toxic substances which nobody knows how to make safe and which remain an incalculable danger to the whole of creation for historical or even geological ages. To do such a thing is a transgression against life itself, a transgression infinitely more serious than any crime ever perpetrated by man. The idea that a civilization could sustain itself on the basis of such a transgression is an ethical, spiritual, and metaphysical monstrosity. It means conducting the affairs of man as if people really did not matter at all.

Yet today we bluntly shun that warning, and press on with a nuclear energy programme, even though it costs at least 1,000 million to build *one*

power plant, with its appalling hazards and with consequences that will persist into eternity!

Worse still, although the entire world is certain that there can be no defence against nuclear weapons, and that total annihilation would be the result of nuclear war, we shun détente and squander yet more millions towards this final holocaust.

Thus education and the arts, the social services and all the more civilising areas of life are to be crippled to serve these ends. So where lies our hope?—Because hope I am certain there is. In what they call my old age I find that my belief in the survival of what is good, my faith in the potential goodness of the human race—in short, my optimism—grows rather than diminishes. I become increasingly aware too that the highest development of mankind has come from a constant sequence of acts of disobedience, by men and women who have dared to say NO to what they knew to be wrong. Moreover, the human spirit cannot be quenched by material privation alone.

I spent the happiest years of my professional life in the schools of Oxfordshire, and although I left you fifteen years ago I carry an intensely vivid picture of the life you helped children to have, and of the care you extended where you could to less fortunate children—in the Gambia, for instance. Now, when I'm etching or gardening, I often remember your struggles to encourage each child to reveal his or her uniqueness, to feed children's imaginative and creative powers, and to cultivate their wholeness. We achieved much together, moreover, without the expensive gadgetry of today. The great abiding *simplicities* of life were your guide, and respect for the proper *dignity* of every child and adult was your watchword. You saw *happiness* as an inherent part of living. Now you are fifteen years better, fifteen years further on, more mellow, more outward looking, more internationally minded. And I cannot believe you will lose your way, or that you will ever fail to see that in an *imperfect* world the only *practical* way is *idealism.*

I can say that in all my life I have never known such a caring, positive, deeply considered and idealistic and practical approach to the education of young children as here in Oxfordshire. Nor have I ever known such all-round achievement. *Hold on to these things!* If Plato could join this great gathering of celebration he would surely say again, as he said in *The Republic:*

> Children should dwell in a land of health and PEACE amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in everything.

FRONTIERS

How Public Decisions Are Made

SOME reflections on the choice between the "hard" and the "soft" energy paths are provided by Michael Stiefel in *Technology Review* for last October. This writer, a graduate student at MIT, illustrates the uncertainties in practically all projections of the cost of new technologies, shows the tendency of advocates to weight their estimates with contingent factors, and, finally, points out that views on these absorbing questions result more from basic philosophies of life than from the conclusions of ostensibly rational analysis. The arguments of Amory Lovins, a leading champion of the soft path, are made the basis of discussion. The intent of the writer is to show that the most likely outcome of this great debate will be some sort of compromise incorporating features of both paths. This will be a result of differences of opinion and the extended period of time required for a major changeover.

Underlying convictions, this writer holds, will play a major part in the course of the transition. He says:

> Human beings view the world in terms of constructs they impose on reality. These constructs about the world are never proven or disproven, they simply become more or less reasonable to believe. The amount of evidence required to convince people of the incorrectness of their views is however, strongly related to their *a priori* belief in the truth of their position. . . .
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> Various energy paradigms define the problem differently and, as a result, mandate different solutions. These social views are not based on pure scientific or empirical grounds, but contain certain trans-scientific propositions. Diverse groups tend to talk past each other because different things are "obvious" to different people. Some problems become crucial, others irrelevant, simply because of one's world view.

Not enough attention is paid to this reality of opinion-formation by advocates of change. The best plan is always one which leaves room for differences of individual action, and allows time for people to learn from experience—the people on "both sides" of any controversial issue. The *Technology Review* writer summarizes contrasting outlooks:

> Consider the viewpoint of the "hard path": the solutions to humanity's problems (such as unemployment and starvation) require continued economic growth and technological progress. Within this framework, the energy problem is essentially one of developing efficient, new supplies to meet the needs of a growing world. While we are running short of fossil fuels, there are sufficient alternatives that can supply virtually unlimited energy. Centralized government, and regulation to alleviate environmental and other inequities, will be necessary. Life's psychological complexities, stemming from industrial society, are the price we pay for modern benefits. This hard-path view is not limited to any form of government; it is shared by right-wing dictatorships and democracies alike. Marxist thought, surprisingly, is based squarely within the notions of growth.
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> A soft path view holds that real human growth must be in the social, cultural, and spiritual areas; and that the potential for material growth is limited. Because energy is but a means to an end, "appropriate" technologies emphasize the ability to realize social goals such as energy frugality, political decentralization, and environmental neutrality. Within this framework, the energy problem is how to meet, in the most efficient manner, the heterogeneous energy end-use needs. The use of coal is limited by social and ecological constraints. Nuclear power is handicapped by problems of weapons proliferation, safety, and lack of public acceptance. Dependence on foreign oil is dangerous from the standpoint of economics and national security. Energy policies should emphasize conservation and development of renewable sources, such as the sun and the wind. . . .
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> What is needed is a series of "critical experiments," on an intermediate level, that could distinguish between paradigms and help people determine which options are reasonable and which ones are not.

This sort of experimental approach seems very much on the side of advocates of the soft path. Conservation and frugality are policies that anyone can put into effect. Taking advantage of the sun and the wind has always been feasible for single individuals and small groups. It is at least

possible for soft-path methods to be demonstrated and tested in a wide variety of small-scale ways. Enormous solar installations are of course possible, but by no means necessary to begin with. But nuclear installations are monstrously large and so costly that government grants are required to finance them. What happens, then, if twenty years later we find that they are not really a good thing? Junk them? Even that would be an awesome project.

Amory Lovins, the *Technology Review* writer says, has clarified the issues by his vigorous arguments and penetrating analysis:

> Probing the assumptions of the hard path advocates, Lovins has shown flaws and self-satisfaction with incomplete plans to be prevalent.
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> Most revealing, the quality of the response to his interwoven sociopolitical and technical arguments has often been poor. A good illustration is the nuclear power issue: the uncertainty surrounding people's acceptance of nuclear power is on social and psychological grounds. Proponents argue technically, but to deaf ears. By the time the public begins to sort out the arguments, nuclear power suffers a severe setback.

At the end Michael Stiefel asks, speculatively, if the soft path can guarantee an end to depressions, and he also wonders about how to regulate centralized power plants. Then he says:

> As long as regulatory and economic power is concentrated in Washington, most of the tensions and disadvantages of the society that Lovins finds disagreeable will remain. This does not mean that we cannot alleviate matters by adopting some soft technologies. However, technical fixes are insufficient to solve social problems. As John Adams pointed out, any society will have an aristocracy in whatever its people value. . . .
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> Humans are dialectical beings, with antithetical desires. They are cosmic, creative, technological beings. They are also societal and spiritual beings. As a result, one cannot build ethics into a system. Morality, as Socrates knew, must be taught by example, not only by education. No technological or political structure will accomplish this.
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> The energy technology debate is a misnomer. We are really wrangling over the future course of our society. With uncertainty, and disagreement over values, society will move slowly and pursue no single policy. Attempts to push faster and harder in one direction will only increase the amount of social instability. Visions of the future are valuable; they just cannot be guaranteed.

It is encouraging to find this perceptive psychology coming out of MIT.