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SOME PEOPLE HAVE BEGUN

THE outgrowing of ideology is a long and burdensome task, accomplished at numerous levels, often accompanied by struggle and pain. For most people today the creeds of religion no longer have compelling meaning, if any meaning at all. The creeds of politics are or ought to be regarded as less important, concerned with only the external aspects of our lives, but until recently they have maintained a stronger grip on the emotions than religious beliefs. Yet political faiths are now dying away. One way of becoming sure that they die would be to replace them with more fundamental credos. Another would be to take some account of how, over the years, they have been losing their hold on the minds of people.

Thoreau was perhaps the first American to put politics or ideology in its place. At the end of *Life Without Principle* (1863) he said:

> What is called politics is comparatively something so superficial and inhuman, that, practically, I have never fairly recognized that it concerns me at all. The newspapers, I perceive, devote some of their columns specially to politics or government without charge; and this, one would say, is all that saves it; but, as I love literature, and, to some extent, the truth also, I never read those columns at any rate. I do not wish to blunt my sense of right so much.

Well, there are affairs, largely public, which need to be taken care of. What would Thoreau do about them? He apparently regarded political functions much as Buckminster Fuller regards technological functions—they should be conducted silently, invisibly, "organically," without fuss. As Thoreau put it:

> Those things which now most engage the attention of men, as politics and the daily routine, are, it is true, vital functions of human society, but should be unconsciously performed, like the corresponding functions of the physical body. They are *infra*-human, a kind of vegetation. I sometimes awake to a half-consciousness of them going on about me, as a man may become conscious of some of the processes of digestion in a morbid state, and so have the dyspepsia, as it is called. It is as if a thinker submitted himself to be rasped by the great gizzard of creation. Politics is, as it were, the gizard of society, full of grit and gravel, and the two political parties are its opposite halves,—sometimes split into quarters, it may be, which grind on each other. Not only individuals, but states, have thus a confirmed dyspepsia, which expresses itself, you can imagine by what sort of eloquence. Thus our life is not altogether a forgetting, but also, alas! to a great extent, a remembering, of that which we should never have been conscious of, certainly not in our waking hours. Why should we not meet, not always as dyspeptics, to tell our bad dreams, but sometimes as *eu*peptics, to congratulate each other on the ever-glorious morning? I do not make an exorbitant demand, surely.

Think of it! The days would go by without all those interruptions of what we are about by people who tell us that they have or want to have the power to do what we, in our lowly and disconnected estate, are unable to do for ourselves. They do not inform us of the facts of life, but of the importance of arrangements which keep us from having access to the facts of life. These arrangements are *essential,* they say. Well, they are essential in the sense that the advertising business is essential to our well-being. As the editor of *Harper's* put it earlier this year:

> Now that the Presidential campaign has begun in earnest, the candidates who appear in the shop windows of the media must display themselves in a manner appropriate to the season's merchandise. If they wish to court the public's favor, they must conform to the specifications on the label, either smiling or grim as befits the station of their image in a society of images. They have as little choice in the matter as a box of cereal or a hat.

Which recalls in passing an article in a recent *Saturday Review* (a magazine once concerned with literature) on the way the presidential candidates wear their hair—a story apparently

meant to be funny. It goes on for a full page, although its entire point is well put at the beginning: "Television interviews are vehicles for physical communication more than they are revelations of specific positions. Candidates for the White House do not differentiate between appearance and reality." Of course. They want to be elected.

But this is not criticism, only frivolity. Ideology is about serious matters. It has things to say about the welfare of mankind. Turning serious, then, we go to something written by Lewis Mumford for the *Forum* in 1930. He said a half century ago:

> When Europe went to war, I was eighteen, and I believed in "The Revolution." Living in a world choked with injustice and poverty and class strife, I looked forward to an uprising on the part of the downtrodden, who would overthrow the master class and bring about a regime of equality and brotherhood. In the subsequent years I learned the difference between a mass uprising and the prolonged spiritual travail and creation of a more organic transformation; politically, I am no longer naive enough to believe that any militant uprising can change the face of the world. But I have never been a Liberal, nor do I subscribe to the notion that justice and liberty are best achieved in homeopathic doses. If I cannot call myself a revolutionist, it is not because the current programs for change seem to me to go too far: the reason is because they are superficial and do not go far enough.

Now comes his central point:

> My principal quarrel with the Russian communists, for example, is not so much over their ruthlessness in achieving the new order, as over their acceptance of half the fallacies of the mechanistic system of thought which happened to be dominant when Marx formulated his revolutionary dogmas. This Communist ideology subordinates all human values to a narrow utilitarian scheme, as if production had no other end than production, and the result is a caricature of both society and the human personality. The orthodox communist has not escaped the mechanistic prison by taking possession of it and assuming the duties of jailer; nor does the jail look more inviting when it is called a Proletarian Palace.
>
> It is a new life I would aim at, not simply a new balance of power. Such a life would leave less of the present world standing than Soviet Russia has left. . . .

What about "patriotism"?

> To confine human association to the political state, or to make membership in that state the highest good, is like trying to put an actual landscape that stretches many miles toward the horizon into a wooden picture frame. Cultures cannot be isolated; they grow by perpetual intercourse across the boundaries of time and space, without cross-fertilization they are sterile—sterile and sour.
>
> As an expression of the will to power, the sovereign state is an enemy of culture: its only significant purpose is to preserve justice and liberty among its constituent cities, regions associations, corporations. This purpose is not furthered by patriotic taboos, fortifications, tariffs, frontiers, and an everlasting parade or the instruments of war. "My country" is the common territory of all men of good will. As for the actual soil, I agree with Nathaniel Hawthorne when he said that New England was about as large a patch of earth as he could feel any affection for.

This sort of analysis is hard on the Communists but seems justified because Communism as we know it is a rigorous application of the logic of its assumption—the mechanistic assumption applied to the management of society. Seeing how this works wakes people up. In the *American Scholar* for the Autumn of 1966 Michael Polanyi described the rebellion of the Hungarian writers and intellectuals in 1956, which led to a more general uprising. It began with the revolt of the Petöfi Circle, intellectuals who were party members, and were joined by others in the party:

> They demanded a reversal of the position assigned to human thought in the Marxist-Leninist scheme. Marxism-Leninism taught that public consciousness is a superstrucrure of the underlying relations of production; public thought under socialism, therefore, must be an instrument of the party controlling socialist production.
>
> The meetings rejected this doctrine. They affirmed that truth must be recognized as an independent power in public life. The press must be

> set free to tell the truth. The murderous trials based on faked charges were to be publicly condemned and their perpetrators punished; the rule of law must be restored. And, above all, the arts corrupted by subservience to the party must be set free to arouse the imagination and to tell the truth. It was this outbreak that created the center of opposition that later overthrew the Communist government of Hungary.

As he explains, Polanyi wrote this article, not to reproach the West for failing to support the Hungarian Revolution with money and arms, but to call attention to our failure to understand what the revolt meant. Western scholars could not understand it because the rules of their discipline—called "scientific"—shut out its meaning. In short, we think the way the communists think. The Hungarian rebels demanded recognition of the ideals of "truth, justice and liberty," and a return to these principles in Hungarian life. But scientific scholarship does not recognize either "truth" or its pursuit. Polanyi quoted American social scientists who explained that to say people "fight for truth" is "naïve or unscientific." One of them declared that to try to answer questions such as "What is a good society?" is "mere political theology." All that science can be concerned with is "events which may be observed with the senses and their extension." Polanyi comments:

> Most academic experts refuse to recognize that the mere thirst for truth and justice has caused the revolts now transforming the Soviet countries. They are not Marxists, but their views are akin to Marxism in claiming that the scientific explanation of history must be based on something more tangible than the fact that people change their minds. . . . But what the revolution in Hungary—and the whole movement of thought of which it formed a part—declared was a doctrine of political science in the traditional sense of the term. The movement condemned a society in which thought—the thought of science, morality, art, justice, religion—is not recognized as an autonomous power. It rejected life in such a society as corrupt, suffocating and stupid.

What was the Russian Revolution? Polanyi answers:

> A great number of men—led by one man possessing genius—set themselves limitless aims that had no bearing at all on reality. They detested everything in existence and were convinced therefore that the total destruction of existing society and the establishment of their own absolute power on its ruins would bring total happiness to humanity. That was—unbelievable as it may seem—*literally* the whole substance of their projects for a new economic, political and social system of mankind.
>
> I think that this is now dawning on the minds of people all over the planet. The realization of the fact that we have wasted half a century of European history, and in the process well-nigh destroyed our civilization, may lead to shattering thoughts beyond my horizon. On the other hand, the final dissolution of the bogus salvation promised by our revolutions may exorcise at last the bogey of its hellish powers. Once the disasters of the past fifty years are clearly seen to have been pointless, Europeans may turn once more to cultivating their own garden.

The main drive of Polanyi's article, however, is his criticism of a "value-free sociology," in which love of truth and freedom cannot be accepted as motives in human behavior. Other reasons for what people do must be found—practical reasons, reasons of *interest.* Principles, in this view, have no part in the shaping of human life.

Curiously, a long review-article in the May *Harper's* by one of the editors, Walter Karp, finds the history texts of the nation's schools more or less in agreement with this idea. Drawing on Frances Fitzgerald's *America Revisited: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century* (Atlantic/ Little, Brown), Mr. Karp blames John Dewey for the removal of historic issues from the teaching of history in America's schools.

> Democracy, according to Dewey, was "primarily a mode of associated living," which for most Americans meant working together in factories. . . . The new "realistic" definition of democracy even stripped public education of its *theoretical* republican objective, which was, as Jefferson said, to teach future citizens "how to judge for themselves what will secure or endanger their freedom." Such knowledge was unlikely to enhance, and might well impair, "industrial cooperation." The new object of

"democratic" education, Dewey said, was to teach every child "to perceive the essential interdependence of an industrial society." Thus instructed, the future citizen (i.e., factory worker) would develop what Dewey called "a socialized disposition.". . .

In social studies, American youngsters would learn that America was chiefly an industrial system and not a republic at all, that a "good citizen" is a worker who gets up when the alarm clock rings and speeds to his job on time.

After World War I local control of the schools diminished, and "the number of school districts was cut from 120,000 to less than half that number."

By a dozen different devices—licensing laws, state guidelines, and so on—control of the curriculum passed completely out of the hands of citizens and into the grip of an increasingly tight-knit, ingrown professional hierarchy. . . . With the outbreak of World War II the oligarchy struck at once. . . . For the next twenty-five years every new textbook used in the schools was written on the assumption that its readers were potential subversives. . . .

From the new textbooks readers learned that democracy meant the right to vote and nothing more, a definition that does not distinguish America's republican institutions from the totalitarian politics of the Soviet Union. . . . A more common denigration was the textbooks' insistence that what was truly great about America was its enormous gross national product. The textbooks, Fitzgerald says, were "far more enthusiastic" about the GNP than about the Bill of Rights. . . . Whereas "cooperation" had been the dubious deity of the original industrial pedagogy, the new deity enshrined in the propaganda texts was productivity pure and simple. One prominent junior-high-school history text argued, for example, that slavery was not all that bad because it alleviated America's chronic shortage of labor. Whereas Lincoln had said that if slavery was not evil then nothing was evil, this modern school text, still in use ten years ago, taught children that nothing is evil if it enhances production—the common principle of the capitalist, the commissar, and the tyrant.

Things happen to people, and people respond to "social forces."

In the new sociologized history texts, no human being has ever enjoyed sufficient power to do anything for good or ill. Famous men, in this "democratic history," are loci of impotence with illustrious names attached. Watergate, in the latest texts, is something that happened to Richard Nixon and history in general is a slew of forces, pressures, and disasters inflicted by fate on the high and the mighty, who appear as hapless men of good will. "There are," Fitzgerald says, "no human agencies left."

The judgments grow harsher and harsher:

In the no-action history of the textbooks, abstractions do everything because humans are forbidden to do anything. At all costs the reader must never be allowed to suspect that people are capable of making a difference. Like the Stone Age tribes they are asked to admire, our children are now taught to regard the American past as an incomprehensible destiny as empty of human purpose as the landscape of the moon.

Here vaguely reflected, are the doctrines of the social scientists, and also the basic mechanist claim that people never do anything except in response to some external stimulus. But Mr. Karp is mainly concerned with what he regards as the elimination of *political* history from the texts. His hero, with some justification, is David Saville Muzzey, whose lively books were displaced after the first world war.

Muzzey's readers learned, first and foremost, that the actions of people made American history and that the high and the mighty have power—a liberating truth in itself. Moreover, the powerful bore constant watching, for villainy was not unknown in high places. . . . A Yankee Republican of the old school, Muzzey seems to have viewed all modern life as one giant menace to liberty and self-government. The major problem of the age, he warned young readers, was "the corruption of the government by the money power." American democracy needed defending, and it had nothing to do with industrial cooperation.

Well, there is politics and politics. There is Plato's politics, directly concerned with the welfare of the polls. There is ideological politics, which seeks absolute power to do absolute good, and as Carl Popper observed, it usually results in hell on earth. Then there is power politics, the kind we have in the United States, now made so complicated by technology and centralization that

tracking villainy to its lair has become an almost impossible task. This sort of politics is indeed calculated to "blunt the sense of right," much more than in Thoreau's day.

In a way, the modern history-books are right in implying that both leaders and led are powerless people. One could say that indifference to power politics—Thoreau's sort of indifference—is a privilege that must be earned through practice of the politics of responsibility.

Learning how to turn politics into the organic function of the body of society—requiring no more attention than our digestive processes—will no doubt take time. There are so many things we'll have to start doing for ourselves. But at the community level it may be easy enough. That is where some people have already begun.

REVIEW

SELF-ACTUALIZATION—IN PROCESS

ABRAHAM MASLOW, the man who turned modern psychology around, died just ten years ago, and his conversations with himself—not meant to be private—are now available, all 1329 pages of them, in the two volumes of *The Journals of A. H. Maslow,* edited by Richard J. Lowry, under the guidance of Bertha Maslow, and published by Brooks Cole (Monterey, Calif.) at $50.00. Some observations by the editor make a good introduction:

> The autobiographical writings of eminent persons are often marred by literary posturing and artificiality. Maslow however, managed to avoid these pitfalls almost entirely. I believe that this is because he was simply not given to posturing and artificiality—I would almost say not capable of it. Be that as it may, this ingenuous quality of Maslow's journals also made for certain editorial problems. When Maslow had something to write, he simply wrote it, without stopping to bother with the conventional literary amenities. The result is that much of the Journals in their original form cannot be read without a struggle.

By reason of Mr. Lowry's expert hand, there is no longer any struggle. We now have a readable but appropriately complex account of how Maslow planned his work—or how his work shaped his life—in journal entries which, as the editor says, go right to the point. This directness gives the reader the feeling of being in the presence of a man of action, which is exactly the case.

The first entry—for March 2, 1959—explains that reading the journals of Kierkegaard and Ruth Benedict gave him the idea of this means of ordering the thoughts and themes on which he was working—sometimes thirty or forty of them at a time. He had realized that he was actually constructing "a philosophy of human nature," which meant: "Everything I write seems to be connected with everything else I'm writing, so that I'm tempted to make *six* carbons for cross-indexing—& it could as easily be 12 carbons." Keeping a journal would help.

He also felt that his notes might be of use to others after his death. "The journal system is better for salvaging incomplete stuff for someone else to finish." He explained:

> Maybe this is also a publishable form—that is, useful for other people as well as for myself. Every intellectual used to keep a journal, and many have been published & are usually more interesting & more instructive than the final formal perfected pages which are so often phony in a way—so certain, so structured, so definite. The *growth* of thought from its beginnings is also instructive—maybe even more so for some purposes. I've been learning to do this in my public lectures a little more—honestly thinking out loud when I'm not so certain of what I'm saying—show my uncertainty. More honest, more humble, more true. I'm old enough & well enough known so that people in an audience are apt to take as gospel even my uncertainties, my guesses. I feel now the responsibility of not misleading, of not having transference-convictions in my audiences. If I present my conclusions as tentative, I hate for them to be heard as certain!

It was the connection of everything with everything else that made new springs of thought keep bubbling up:

> One of my real jobs of self-discipline is controlling & organizing all these intellectual wild horses & trying to keep some sort of order in my intellectual household economy, not to give up a half-finished job in favor of some beautiful inspiration. If I pursued each insight as it came forth, I'd never get any *one* of them done—there are too many. That's one of my sadnesses as I get older—there are so many births from among which I have to choose & let the other offspring die. Just not enough time & energy. So it happens that much of what is actually published is not what is most important to me but of what is quickest and easiest to do, or what retains its initial inspiration & enthusiasm to get finished before another lovely idea seizes me & organizes me & pulls my energies to it. Like having too many children to feed & bring up.

Some of the entries define projects, others record disenchanted musing on what goes on. Although he worked in colleges and universities, he was no academic. That is, his encounters with

experience were humanly direct, without institutional filters or departmental cushions. One time in Missouri (late 1965) he set down:

> Don't feel like writing yet, or reading. But must save note on insight a few days ago on Western Illinois U. in Macomb. Brand new. Motel-style buildings. Huge. 6000 students in herds from class to class. Depressing. No feeling of intellect or beauty or virtue, etc. Look like a bunch of construction workers or Masonic order patiently going over the required hurdles & senseless tasks, which just "exist" & must be finished one by one in order to be "normal," get a job, etc. It struck me that this whole system is to real learning as churches are to religion. Punched-card, IBM version, bureaucratic, mass-consumption arrangement of genius, ecstasies, illuminations. . . . It all gets "organized," & the bureaucrats & accountants take it all over, the registrar, the admissions director, the faculty secretaries—all people who haven't the slightest inkling of what they are in charge of. Like the "religious" people who do all the rituals, beads, dogmas, ceremonies & call the innocently religious people atheists who will go to hell. (Bertha got this from Gorki's autobiography.) Why is it that the worst bastards are the most punctilious, most churchly religious and ritualistic, & consider themselves the most religious & then step on the truly religious? Well, I've said my say on this point in religion, & think I should do the same for education, for learning & the love of learning. . . . The great ones, most of them, couldn't get a job at Western Illinois University—or at Harvard or Brandeis for that matter—except by some accident. What would the Christian churches around here do with Jesus? The Buddhists with Buddha? The psychology departments with Freud? Is there a sociology department any place that would hire Comte? Could Socrates get a job at Brandeis?
>
> Yesterday A.M. in Hannibal we saw the Mark Twain House. Fine! But then what about the Tom 'n' Huck Motel? The Mark Twain Emergency truck? The Becky Thatcher drive-in? I got sick of it & turned away from it. Everybody living off his blood & probably never even read him.

There's not much point in trying here to sketch an outline of Maslow's psychology. Summarizing statements tend to be empty unless made by genius, and even geniuses don't always have good ones on tap for immediate use. Happily, Maslow's books are available, most of them in print, and for general background *Toward a Psychology of Being* is still the best thing to read, and the title sums up the engagement of his life.

Here was a man who, while he obtained his share of concepts from other thinkers, used them only as he could animate them with what he learned from his own experience. That is why Maslow is a psychologist for Everyman. You can always use what he says. He didn't set down any unuseable ideas.

Another thing: There is health and the goal of health in everything he wrote. Nobody reads Maslow and then goes around saying, "I'm more neurotic than you are." He selected among the people he knew the most healthy-minded thinkers and *studied* them to derive the principles of a psychology of health. He found that the really healthy people—in his meaning of the term—turned out to be bright, original, and courageous. The symbolic lives of the great religious teachers showed fascinating correspondences with the qualities of health as he formulated them abstractly and pressed them to further development. Maslow's psychology leaves nothing important, good or evil, out. Essentially, he is a pantheist who finds the promise of the godlike—but mostly only the promise in human beings, and in *all* human beings. This grew credible, even in the middle years of the twentieth century, because his language is everyday, although it swells and sometimes almost bursts with enlarging meanings.

The last entry in these journals was made on May 7, 1970, just a month before his death early in June.

> Much turmoil & sadness last few days as the campus situation gets worse & worse—again, with the impulse to get in there & fight. I wrote a letter to ICIS Fellows, but finally put it aside to soak for a while. Again the feeling of always being in a minority—but which has always turned out later to be a majority. Or, better way to say it: since, when I *do* talk up as if I were all alone, I find always some

(many?) of the silent ones agreeing with me rather than disagreeing as I had expected, then I seem to get cast in the role of leader & spokesman, i.e., of the courageous one. But I'm just not the leader type! I don't like polemics & debate and personal attack. I am not temperamentally "courageous." My courage is really an *overcoming* of all sorts of inhibitions, politeness, gentleness, timidities—& it always costs me a lot in fatigue, tension, apprehension, bad sleep, etc. Somebody asked me the question at the AHP, & also Colin Wilson did: How did a timid youngster get transformed into a (seemingly) "courageous" leader & spokesman? How come I was willing to talk up, to take unpopular positions, while most others didn't? My immediate tendency was to say: "Intelligence—just realistic seeing of the facts." But I held that answer back because—alone—it's wrong. "Good will, compassion, *and* intelligence," I finally answered. I think I added that I'd simply *learned* a lot from my self-actualizing subjects & from their way of life, & from their metamotivations, which have now become *mine.* So I respond emotionally to the injustice, the meanness, the lies, the untruths, the hatred & violence, the simplistic answers that run counter to B-comprehensiveness & B-complexity. So I feel cheap & guilty & unmanly when I *don't* talk up. So then, in a sense, I *have* to. If I were really Olympian & long-term, etc., it would be far better to stick to my work & *solve* the problems positively instead of fighting emergency actions now. So again this A.M. I decided the obvious. What the kids *and* the intellectuals—& everybody else too—need is an ethos, a scientific value system & way of life, & humanistic politics, with the theory, the facts, etc., all set forth soberly. What the kids need is an *alternative* system to the one offered by the stupid hoodlums & the amoral or antimoral intellectuals. Always I come to this conclusion, & always it has been effective with a sizable group, even if not as sizable as it should be. So *again* I must say to myself: to work!

COMMENTARY
"IN SOME SENSE POSSIBLE"

No admirer of John Dewey can be comfortable with what Walter Karp says about his influence on the teaching of history in the public schools. (See pages 2 and 7.) It is impossible to read any of Dewey's books without recognizing his devotion to political as well as intellectual freedom. At the same time, there may be point in Mr. Karp's criticism. Dewey was concerned with the everyday realities in people's lives and suspicious of abstract ideas which are so easily proclaimed while their substance is ignored. But he also wrote (in *Freedom and Culture*):

> Anything that obscures the fundamentally moral nature of the social problem is harmful, no matter whether it proceeds from the side of physical or psychological theory. Any doctrine that eliminates or even obscures the function of choice of values . . . weakens personal responsibility for judgment and for action. . . . A culture which permits science to destroy traditional values but which distrusts its power to create new ones is a culture which is destroying itself.

Dewey would have been horrified by the implications of Mr. Karp's judgment, and have had much to say in reply. Yet the general trend described by the *Harper's* writer has certainly taken place, and a fair comment might be that even the best of men often fail to see the long-term psycho-social consequences of what they say and do.

What can be said about this—truly omnipresent—problem? A passage at the conclusion of an article in the latest *Journal of the New Alchemists* seems to have direct application. The writer, Francisco Varela, says:

> . . . it is not an abstract proposition for me when I say that we must incorporate . . . in the projecting out of our world views, *at the same time* the sense in which that projection is only one perspective, that it is a relative frame, that it must contain a way to undo itself. . . . I cannot say that my political stance is true as opposed to yours, which is false. . . . Sure, I have to take this side, and that is cool, but how do I really embody in that action that I acknowledge the importance of the other side and the essential brotherhood between those two positions? . . . I don't know. I don't think I am that enlightened at all. I wouldn't be able to do that, but in some sense I realize that is a great limitation. That should be in some sense possible.

With this issue we suspend publication for our summer interlude. The next issue of MANAS will be dated September 3.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

ANOTHER KIND OF GROWTH

WE have been reading some more in Neil Postman's *Teaching as a Conserving Activity,* and losing track of what seems most important to say about this book—which might somewhat please the author. No book on education is as filled with warnings as this one. There is even low-key warning against warnings. If we had to rate the book according to truth-content, we should say that most of the statements in it are better than half true, and what is missing would doubtless interfere with the drama of what is armed. One suspects that Mr. Postman's classes in "Media Ecology" at New York University are crowded with students who think he is great. They may become sharp-eyed critics, but not cynics, if they listen to him carefully.

If his teaching is like his writing, they hear things like this:

> Those who are distressed by the prohibition of prayer in the schools sometimes express their grievance by saying that God has been ordered out of the classroom. It is to be wondered what sort of God they have in mind who is stymied by a Supreme Court decision. In any case, consistent with what I have said about ethnic pride and sex education, I do not see it as within the scope of the school to encourage children to practice their religion, or not to. One hopes that every child will come to school with humane ethical conceptions which have been learned at home or in church, and one hopes as well that those who find inspiration or comfort in prayer will have sufficient opportunity to exercise this right in their homes or at church, or wherever else they have a moment of peace—including the study hall, gym and English class, where, typically, intellectual activity is at a minimum. But to make prayer part of the school's program is to implicate school in a realm which it has no business to enter.

One haunting question wouldn't go away while we read this book. It is: What does Mr. Postman want students to go home with, after attending his class, or any class? What, that is, besides suspicions? He seems the ultimate radical, or ultimate conservative, basing his outlook on the Eastern doctrine, All is Maya—adding, *You'd better believe it!*

But if everything we learn is a matter of relative mistakes, what then is life for? It has, perhaps, a pedagogic purpose: Teaching ourselves and others to cope with the ranges of illusion, which means learning how to grade them. Progress, then, is relative triumph over mistakes. What good is that? It is good, the Buddha said, for the elimination of pain. Looking at the world as it is today, or looking just at the schools, could anyone have a better motive?

Well, this is metaphysical language which has a finality not to be found in Mr. Postman's book. He uses other language:

> . . . the point I wish to make is that *all learning is remedial.* If I may dare to contradict Professor Dewey's best-known aphorism, we do not learn by doing; we learn by *not* doing. By trial and error. By making mistakes, correcting them, making more mistakes, correcting them, and so on. The "and so on" is important here, because the process of making mistakes has no end. There is no one who learns how to write or read or calculate or think once and for all. To the end of his life Carl Sandburg, for example, was still struggling, as he himself has told us, to learn the uses of nouns and verbs. As for reading, if the work of I. A. Richards has taught us anything, it is that no one, not even Richards himself, knows how to read. To be sure, some readers make fewer mistakes than others. But there is no one who reaches a point where remediation is not necessary.

What then is a work of genius? It is a work which, by common consent, no one should dare to fix up. Somehow, it is more free of familiar illusions than the reading we are used to. If, as Robert M. Hutchins declared, a classic is contemporary in any age, this means that the illusions produced by the times have hardly touched it. Thoreau must have had some such idea in mind when he said, "Don't read the times, read the Eternities."

Now and then a student comes along who believes in the negative side of this counsel. A. S. Neill tells about a boy who just wouldn't attend

any classes at Summerhill. After years of just playing—doing what seemed important at the time—he got interested in radio. Well, he couldn't make the radios well without knowing some math, so he looked up the Summerhill math teacher and said, Teach me, please, and the math teacher did. In a few weeks or months, the boy knew all the math he needed to do what he wanted to do. And later on this boy had no trouble getting on in the world, if that is important.

Of course, to be like that boy, you need the kind of self-confidence that ignores the warnings of conventional people. How many children are there who are like that? Most children need options. The conventional ways of "learning" need to be available for the ones who would feel lost without them. But the one thing that "mass educators" all seem to forget is that there are some children who don't need conventional education at all, and that the option of doing without it should be somewhere included in the conventional curriculum. How best to make this possibility known is a matter requiring care, if only for the reason that there will be those who think they can skip the ordinary grades and do nothing else. Well, there are always risks involved. Trying to eliminate them entirely would abolish education.

Conventional education is the teaching of technique. Spurious education is the teaching of technique with the pretense that it gives meaning and content to life. True education inspires the search for meaning, with technique as a box of tools that you will need from time to time. As Mr. Postman says:

> People do not speak or write well because they know the mechanics of their language. They know the mechanics of their language because they speak or write well. By this I mean that improved language behavior originates in the deepest need to express one's personality and knowledge, and to do so with variety, control, and precision. Once such a need has been aroused and cultivated, the resources of language, including its mechanics, become objects of intense interest and are apt to be both satisfying and easy to grasp. This is one of the several lessons we may learn from the work of Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Paolo Freire, Herbert Kohl, and others who, in successfully teaching children and adults to read and write with intelligently directed purpose, have seen so clearly that language education involves the transformation of personality.

This is like saying that teachers are—well—secular priests. And they are. By teaching thinking, they help the students to acquire the tools of self-transformation. How do you teach thinking? By showing people how to notice their own mistakes. Teachers preside over practice sessions in self-criticism. They are not responsible for the transformation, only for a few illustrations of how others have done it.

Mr. Postman seems especially good on the threat of modern public communications:

> What is the effect of making people aware of many things over which they have no control? I would suspect that it leads to anomie and an increasing sense of impotence. There are occasions, such as during the Viet Nam War, when a large segment of the population is capable of rousing itself and responding to a grievance. There have been other occasions when similar mass responses have occurred. But the point is that these responses must be made en masse. Individuals no longer live in a context which allows them to have an impact on their environment. McLuhan himself has described the problem. "When man lives in an electric environment," he says, "his nature is transformed and his private identity is merged with a corporate whole. He becomes 'Mass Man'.". . .
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> Mass man, as we know, can be an exceedingly dangerous animal, especially in a situation where there exists skepticism about the basis of traditional authority. As I have pointed out, the electronic information environment tends to undermine hierarchies, while television in particular amplifies the appeal of personality. In such an environment, totalitarian ideas expressed by charismatic people find a congenial ground for growth.

Education, in Neil Postman's view, is preparing another kind of ground for another kind of growth.

FRONTIERS
Obscuring the Sun

EARLY in his career, Gandhi explained to the readers of *Young India:* "If I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics encircle us today like the coil of a snake from which one. cannot get out, no matter how much one tries. I wish therefore to wrestle with the snake." This seems the justification for a lot of the critical material now coming out. *The Sun Betrayed* (Black Rose Books, 3981 boul. St. Laurent, Montreal H2W, 1Y5, Quebec, Canada), by Ray Reece, is an especially good illustration. Working in Austin, Tex., in the years following passage of the Energy Research and Development Act in 1974, Reece noticed that the federal funding which came through was always for research programs proposed by the big companies—"the Exxons and Lockheeds of the land"—while small research and development groups were given no help. Could it be that innovative imagination was all in the big companies? He was unable to believe this, and began an investigation, having in mind an article or two for the *Texas Observer.* Before long he realized that he had to write a book—"a story of deceit, vested interest, and collusion in the highest echelons of U.S. industry and government." *The Sun Betrayed* is the book.

It seems important to say at the start that the betrayers don't think of themselves as against the public interest but as hard-headed saviors of the people from the temptations offered by environmentalists and counter-cultural enthusiasts. But important to add that some of them do think of themselves as twentieth-century Machiavellians who use their craft to keep power in the right hands. Close collaboration between big government and big business is the obvious means. A quotation from Robert Engler's *The Brotherhood of Oil* summarizes what Ray Reece found to be the case with respect to the country's energy plans for the future:

> The federal government remains honeycombed by a network of energy advisory bodies composed of leaders of the major corporations and trade associations, along with the usual decoration of "independents." These advisers define the acceptable bounds of policy alternatives, police their implementation, and in effect become the makers of public policy. They thus undercut the legislative process and distort responsible administration.

Fundamental policy is preservation of the status quo, which means that the present management of existing sources of energy is to continue in charge, retaining control over decision about alternatives. The substantial grants for research all go to the large corporations, while smaller companies and individuals, although they have good ideas—probably the best—are told to sell out to the giant corporations which are said to have the facility and "knowhow" for proper development.

Much of Ray Reece's material comes from 1975 hearings held by the Senate Select Committee on Small Business. Two witnesses, Jerry Plunkett, a Denver solar inventor and consultant, and Jim Piper, a California solar contractor, both with plenty of experience as practical men in the field as well as frustrated applicants for grants, gave testimony:

> Plunkett, Piper and other witnesses before the committee hacked away at the myth that large institutions, whether corporate or academic, could or would even try to be more efficient than small entrepreneurs and "innovators" in the expenditure of government funds for solar energy development. "The federal government," said Plunkett, "has what I believe is an almost incurable habit of undertaking large-scale projects.". . . The "problem" in solar energy, said Plunkett, is not a "basic research" problem: "We don't have to re-invent the wheel. We don't have to have college professors tell us what the intensity of the sun is or that solar energy is a workable system. . . . There are workable systems on people's homes and no need for gathering research data." The "problem" in solar energy is one of moving a simple, long-proven technology out of the laboratory into the marketplace, and that is best accomplished by small private enterprise. "It requires," said Plunkett, "innovation and innovators, not research." Yet "we have found Federal employees unable to understand the solar state-of-the-technology, unable to formulate reasonable plans for

moving solar technology ahead, and in fact, engaging in projects designed to keep university professors employed and off the street, and to use study contracts granted to large firms to make solar energy appear long-term, remote, and unlikely to respond to our present energy crisis."

Why are the innovators ignored by government? Plunkett said that the real innovator comes at the problem from a point of view government people do not understand:

> Whereas the researcher in a corporate or government institution will "structure his programs to serve the needs of the corporation or the government agency . . . the individual innovator does not start at that point at all. He starts at some larger point, such as a societal need, or a perceived need . . . and he has no constraints.". .,
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> "Most bureaucrats," said Plunkett, "who deal with small business inventors are technical people," scientists and engineers who "are unable either to innovate or to appreciate innovation as a process or the 'funny people' who engage in the process."

Small business needs help, Jim Piper told the senators, because universities and foundations can't do what needs to be done or teach what needs to be taught. Asked why they can't do this, Piper replied: "Because they do not have the knowledge to develop it." He explained that you learn how to build by doing it, not by going to school. A senator spoke of MIT's School of Architecture, drawing from Piper the comment, "I have a hunch that half of the people in MIT's School of Architecture do not know a sixteenpenny from a two-by-four."

> Piper was asked later why the major corporations, "vis-a-vis the smaller ones," should not be entrusted with the nation's solar energy program. "The larger corporations," said Piper, "have vested interests right now in maintaining the status quo. If Westinghouse or G.E. came up with a usable solar system immediately, it would harm their profitability in other areas."

The gas and electric utility companies, Reece points out, have greeted the sudden emergence of solar energy with a curious mix of "panic, hostility, and cooptive paternalism." They pretend an interest and experiment a bit in order to control or put off its widespread use. They want the kind of solar energy they can manage for their own interests.

Yet it may get away from them no matter what they do. Ray Reece says:

> Solar power has a built-in appeal to Americans of many stripes and political persuasions, from radical decentralists and environmentalists to family farmers and Republican suburbanites disgusted with ever-higher fuel bills and the sense of being victimized by faceless monopolies over which they have no control. "In an electrical world," writes Amory Lovins, "your lifeline comes not from an understandable neighborhood technology run by people you know who are at your own social level, but rather from an alien, remote, and perhaps humiliatingly uncontrollable technology run by a faraway, bureaucratized, technical elite who have probably never heard of you." Solar power inherently offers the prospect of liberation from the "uncontrollable technology" of centralized energy institutions. It is not so complex, in most of its useful applications, that it can't be managed by persons other than a technical elite. . . . It is also cost-efficient. In the five quick years of its U.S. renaissance, despite attempts to suppress, underfund, and slander its potential, solar energy has become not only a rival of natural gas and electricity for space and water heating in many parts of the country, it has proven itself a genuine threat to other uses of those expensive fossil fuels, including uranium, on the basis of which the utility industry has built its monopoly empire and mortgaged its future.

Even with all the "betrayals" it records, Ray Reece has written an encouraging book.