

## THE WORLD IS SOMETHING MADE

IN that classic study of American origins, *The Great Meadow*, a novel about the settling of Kentucky during the revolutionary war, Elizabeth Madox Roberts describes the apprehensions of an older woman about taking land where the Indians lived. She, and younger men and women, were on their way to the Kentucky Valley. She said:

"Hit's Indian property. The white man has got no rights there. Hit's owned already, Kentuck is. Go, and you'll be killed and skulped by savages, your skulp to hang up in a dirty Indian house or hang on his belt. Hit's already owned. White men are outside their rights when they go there."

The men replied with the assurance of the Greeks before Troy.

"If the Indian is not man enough to hold it let him give it over then. . . . It's only a strong race can hold a good country. Let the brave have and hold there." . . . "The most enduren will take". . . . "Strong men will win there."

That was the spontaneous American position on the frontier. A good Indian was a dead Indian, a policy in which strength made righteousness. The screaming moral contradiction was never felt, hardly thought of. In fifty years Manifest Destiny would leave no room for conscience or the rule of law. *We* would make our own law, like the Athenians at Melos. Yet the Athenians had their warnings from Socrates, the Americans from Tom Paine and a few others like the woman on the way to Kentucky. And since we have changed hardly at all, we have our warnings today. In *Harper's* for last September, the editor, Lewis Lapham, exercises his wit on the matter of terrorism.

Who are the most effective terrorists? *We* are, he says. Our popular art and our foreign policy, he proposes, are all of a piece. "Together with the best-selling American entertainment, American foreign policy rests on a belief in both the necessity and the beauty of violence." The rest of the world copies. Such policies, while in

the present unmistakably brazen, are nothing new. Mr. Lapham says:

Over the last thirty years, the makers of American art and government gradually have abandoned their faith in a democratic future and the hope of a world in which practical men could afford to take seriously something so wimpish as the rule of law. The intellectual mercenaries attracted to Washington since the late 1950s have prided themselves on their toughness of mind, their lack of effeminate compassion, their willingness to sacrifice other people's lives to the purity of an idea seen at Harvard. . . . Like the advocates of the old war in Vietnam, among them McGeorge Bundy and Arthur Schlesinger, the preachers of war in Nicaragua, among them Jeane Kirkpatrick and Pat Buchanan, derive their zeal for adventure from their reading of books. They fondle the weight and heft of their threats as if they were boys playing with guns. . . .

During the Eisenhower Administration, John Foster Dulles, a corporate lawyer turned Secretary of State, formulated the precepts of unremitting war. President Kennedy sought to prove the validity of those precepts in South Vietnam, imagining that he could endorse the removal of Ngo Dinh Diem with the impunity of a Mafia chieftain ordering the death of a loan shark. President Nixon invented "the madman theory of diplomacy" as a means of showing himself as dangerous as any Shiite gunman and as willing to touch a match to the nuclear fire. The doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction, which had governed American strategy for twenty years, rests on what Alexander Haig, another warrior far more familiar with briefing rooms than with battlefields, once described as "the balance of terror." As calmly as if he were drawing a diagram on a blackboard, Haig went on to explain that only by promising to obliterate civilization could the righteous children of the earth preserve civilization.

Our policy had succinct summary in Wordsworth's lines—

The good old rule  
The Simple plan  
That they should take who have  
the power  
And they should keep who can.

If, by reason of dilemmas of debt and the manifest ineffectuality of obtaining order by force of arms, the people should begin to lose faith, the movies and TV are likely to restore it. As Lapham says:

The portrait of the world in display in the movies, in the best-selling fiction, and on prime-time television teaches the same bleak lesson. The season's hit film, *Rambo*, was grossing \$25 million a week at the box office when the gunmen, as well dressed as any of Don Corleone's subalterns, seized the TWA plane over Athens. In the movie Sylvester Stallone plays a talented if psychopathic terrorist pressed into the service of the American flag. Audiences cheer the spectacle of Stallone eliminating battalions of Russian and North Vietnamese soldiers with a merciless and fanatic devotion that undoubtedly would recommend itself to the Ayatollah Khomeini. Asked to define his patriotic state of mind, Stallone says, "To survive a war, you must become war." Henry Kissinger advocated precisely the same line of policy when asked, on at least two television networks, to explain how he would resolve the impasse in Beirut.

As Bruno Bettelheim said in *The Informed Heart*, children saturated with TV entertainment may become unable "to respond to real persons because they rouse so much less feeling than the skilled actor."

Worse, they lose the ability to learn from reality, because life experiences are more complicated than the ones they see on the screen, and no one comes in at the end to explain it all. Conditioned to being given explanations, he [the child] has not learned to puzzle for one of his own. He gets discouraged when he cannot grasp the meaning of what happens to him and is thrown back once more to find a culprit within predictable stories on the screen. . . . This being seduced into passivity and discouraged about facing life actively, on one's own, is the real danger of TV, much more than the often assinine or gruesome contents of the shows.

Mr. Lapham draws a similar conclusion:

The romance of crime is as traditional as the Hollywood gangster movie. As often as not the violent man proves to be the hero of the piece. The James Bond and Clint Eastwood movies, *The A-Team* and *Miami Vice*, *Conan the Barbarian*, *The Terminator*, *Blade Runner*, *Star Wars*, *Beverly Hills Cop*—all the stories take place in a moral wilderness

that resembles, in its emptiness and despair if not in its set decoration, the ruin of Beirut. The brutalization of the nation's artistic imagination over the last thirty years has reduced the media to the telling and retelling of the bedouin's tale. Whether cast as a detective or a CIA agent, the wandering hero finds solace in violence, and his story always ends with a killing. It's the only plot he knows.

We have what we are in the habit of calling an "advanced civilization." Naturally enough, the "less developed" nations, organized for the most part by men with a Western education, imitate what we do. They have neither our skills nor our resources, and so they usually fail and go into debt, which makes things worse instead of better. The lesson of history is that this has happened again and again. Then the terrorists appear and copy our violence. It makes you wonder about the value of civilization and "progress." History is dotted with principled men and women who counseled another course—the Buddha and other teachers in India, Socrates and Plato in Greece, and in modern times men like Gandhi and Schweitzer. Their ideas are beginning to be heard, leading to minority movements all over the world, but as yet they are not strong enough—and probably not wise enough—to assume leadership, so the world continues on a downhill path.

Yet there are noticeable changes for the better, as Lewis Lapham's conclusion implies:

The history of philosophy and religion, in concert with the logic of modern physics, suggests that the world is as one conceives it, that mankind remains free to make the world in whatever image he chooses, according to the specifications of his own fear and desire. Maybe we have yet to learn that the world is something made, not found. If we begin to conceive and represent the world as something other than a dream of violence, maybe we won't find ourselves besieged by so many people who imitate our romantic example.

In the issue of *Harper's* we have been quoting, Mr. Lapham put together contents which draw attention to various infections which have overtaken our entire society. One discussion is made up of what a group of athletes, coaches, sports officials, and journalists—eight in all—have

to say about the "big business" of present-day sports. The moderator of this interchange of opinion was George Plimpton, a former pro athlete and a writer, now editor of *Paris Review*. Howard Cosell, producer and host of ABC's Sportbeat, began by saying:

In my view, sports is a deeply perverted element in American society. The frequently touted uplifting qualities associated with sports have become but a murky blur in a morass of hypocrisy, corruption, and deceit that I like to call the sports syndrome. Of course, the inherent rewards of sports are the same as they have always been: the fulfillment of discovering one's own athletic skills, of taking part in a team effort, of learning one's physical limits and pushing those limits back. But these values have become subservient to the sports syndrome, which has at its heart a number of very doubtful postulates that in my view delineate the problems facing sports today.

CBS sports news correspondent, Robert Lipsyte, observes:

We examine sports more closely today than we did in the past because the higher stakes have made sports much more worth examining. So we discover to our surprise that our heroic professional athletes—like many people—have a fondness for money and drugs. But where this infusion of money has profoundly changed the basic situation is not in the professional ranks, where it is most visible, but in college sports. Because of the huge sums colleges stand to make from television contracts, many schools have virtually mortgaged themselves to their sports programs. . . .

Sports affects the decisions made by governments—decisions about land that must be appropriated for a new stadium, roads that must be built to reach it, legislators who must be manipulated to get it built. Sports affects the entire educational system—both directly, by shaping our so-called student athletes and indirectly, by spreading corruption and hypocrisy throughout the schools.

The commercialization of youthful athletes reaches down and affects children in junior high who show athletic promise. They begin to get special privileges, on the theory that they may some day make a lot of money for their colleges.

Harry Edwards, a University of California sociologist, remarks:

American sports—the huge commercial enterprise Americans have made of both professional and amateur sports—tells us something important about our country: about what is happening to us as a nation and as a people. This is especially so today, when television lets us really *see* sports—the corruption and drugs and crass commercialism—for the first time, just as, during Vietnam, television let us see the blood and mess and destruction of war for the first time. We are able to watch at close range the systematic ripping-off of our best nineteen-year-olds. The glorification of athletics on television, especially in extravaganzas like the Olympics, encourages parents to push their seven- and eight- and nine-year-old kids through horrendously grueling practice programs in swimming, gymnastics, skating—whatever sport looks like it might lead to a gold medal, if not to some other kind of gold somewhere down the line. . . .

For better or worse, colleges and universities have become farm clubs for professional basketball and football teams and the principal training ground for our Olympic teams. These kids do not come to college looking for an education, most of them lack the basic preparation that would allow them to benefit from one. What can Digger Phelps [coach at Notre Dame] do with a kid who, while he may be the greatest basketball player in the world, can't read, can't write, can't add or subtract, can't figure out his change at the grocery store?

David J. Stern, Commissioner of the National Basketball Association, remarks:

Consider the coach who's brought in to a school like Santa Fe State. He's given a six-figure salary, a rent-free home, a local television show, and told to turn the program around. His job depends on making the team a winner—fast. If the team makes the final four, the school gets a million bucks to build a new field house. And for ten grand he can recruit a player who will take him there. Tough choice, isn't it?

This "seminar" runs a full eleven pages in *Harper's*, with a lot of detail, much of it grimy. Just once someone said that "big-time college sports should be abolished," but no one considered the idea seriously. They just want to "clean things up," and make some suggestions, but the most relevant comment was that: "The simple fact is that it is irrational for an athlete or a coach to behave ethically today. Perhaps Americans have grown up enough to face that." The point is

that even our show windows, where we put our best foot forward, are now revealing what things—and ourselves—are really like. The trouble, except for its extreme exaggeration, is not with sports; the trouble is with the prevailing conception of the meaning of life. The only writers really worth reading these days are the ones who draw attention to this and say what they think about it.

One other article in the September *Harper's* has something of this character—"Holding to the Land" by Ralph Beer, who has a cattle ranch in central Montana. Farmers like him have become anachronisms and he has been thinking about what lies behind the failure of so many farmers. In one place he muses about strip mining:

If you haven't had the opportunity to watch a GEM (Giant Earth Mover) in action, scooping up sixty cubic yards of coal and sod at a bite, believe in this: it is a wondrous reaping of "natural possibilities." All that power, efficiency, and technology, all that alien iron brought to bear on one grassy spot, makes you tremble. And it makes you wonder too, how much coal would have to be dug to generate the immense amount of energy required to build a machine of that size in the first place. How many months of digging? How many years?

Meanwhile, the machines used on his ranch grew bigger and bigger. His grandfather switched from draft horses to tractors in the 1940s, and after twenty years the tractors grew in size, and so did the ranches. "Large farming became known as agribusiness, the business end often operated by executive non-farmers in distant cities. The family farmer, who lived where he worked, came to be seen as a picturesque anachronism, his antiquated way of life often seeming to stand in the way of progress."

Our government urged us down the path of maximum size, maximum specialization, and maximum production—to be achieved, however, with a minimum of farmers. Only now are voices beginning to be raised that all this maximizing is exhausting our topsoil, and that by century's end we may be witnessing shortages, not surpluses.

The great dream of American agriculture has been to make the desert bloom. And it has been done.

Yet in the semi-arid West, where rapid population growth and water-hungry industries have greatly increased the demand for clean water, aquifers have begun to show signs of depletion. . . .

We store great quantities of surplus food in warehouses' and hide cheese in caves, yet the Physician Task Force on Hunger in America recently reported that hunger is at epidemic proportions. The five o'clock news shows us not only the starving multitudes in Africa but farm families in Iowa who subsist on potatoes rejected by local wholesalers *because they can't afford to buy food*. How could things have gotten so out of hand in our land of plenty that farmers have to worry about buying food, when it's farmers who *raise* the food?

We don't have an answer to that question, unless it is possibly in *Food First*, the book by Frances Lappé and Joseph Collins. Toward the end of his article, Ralph Beer says:

Montana now has a suicide hotline for people in agriculture. . . . It's not toll free. Last November, the Montana Department of Agriculture released a study showing that 45 percent of the state's farmers believe they will go out of business in the next five years if current conditions persist. It's no wonder farmers are found hanging from the rafters in their barns. . . .

When, finally, you're faced with the choice of continuing an operation which seems less viable every day or retiring young and financially secure, you realize that maybe it's a way of life you've been after all along, and not the good life. But when you admit that you're clinging to a doomed way of life, no matter what your reasons, a distance begins to grow between you and your past, between you and your land, between you and yourself. What ranching often comes down to today is a last chance of acting out what your best dreams have demanded you ought to be.

We have, then, a heritage of violence, of moneychasing, and agribusiness instead of farming—exactly what Thomas Jefferson predicted would ruin us all. We must be grateful to *Harper's* and its editor for devoting an issue to pointing it out. We try in *MANAS*, from week to week, to suggest a few things that we all might do, or even just one or two of us might do.

## *REVIEW*

### WHAT LIES AHEAD

EIGHT years ago Warren Johnson wrote *Muddling Toward Frugality* to persuade his readers of the good sense of getting along on less. He is one of the minority who recognize that before long we shall enter the age of scarcity, and one of the still smaller minority who look forward to this change as being a good thing. "We can," he said, "move toward a secure, sustainable way of life if we accept the logic of frugality."

He has now written another book, *The Future Is Not What it Used To Be* (Dodd, Mead, 1985, \$16.95), in which he details the several ways in which the days of affluence will soon be over, and why. We named our society the affluent society; he would call it the wasteful society. He wants people to change their ways, which means first to change their thinking, and he is gently but perceptively persuasive in giving both practical and principled reasons for changing. In his first chapter he talks about the value of restraint, saying in one place, "Selflessness, the subjective theme of this book, could make restraints functional in terms of personal human satisfaction as well as public well-being."

How do you teach people self-restraint? Actually, you don't. They have to learn it themselves, usually from painful experience. Yet even in the affluent society you run across people—a few—to whom self-restraint comes naturally; people who never try to have more than they need, who by nature are unable to waste anything, who have somehow taught themselves to think more about the welfare of others and the good of the community than about their own interests. Usually, you find, they had parents who behaved in this way, so that restraint is for them a painless, natural habit. They are, moreover, happy people who don't easily get upset. They are the kind of people we need and Mr. Johnson hopes to increase their number with his book, which is, in short, a Socratic enterprise.

The early chapters are about economic failure—ours. We do not have before us another era of abundance, mainly because we have largely used our continent up. What is happening to the farmers is archetypal of what will eventually happen to us all. When the big farming machines came along, starting, say, in the 1950s, the farmers felt that they had to have them, which also meant having more land for their use, to pay for them.

The only way to utilize these machines profitably was to use them on large acreages, but few farmers could afford to buy not only the new machines but more land as well. Most small farmers had two choices, two ways to go broke. They could go broke quickly buying the machines but not being able to use them on enough land to earn the money to make their payments. Or they could go broke slowly without buying the machines and trying to live on a declining income as the new machines brought down the cost of growing food—and the prices farmers received for their crops. The larger farmers could make a living at these prices, but they meant poverty for small farmers. In 1960, the *average* annual farm income was \$2,907, which includes the incomes of the large farmers too!

How do you solve a problem like that? Study the Amish, Mr. Johnson says. Wendell Berry says the same thing. The Amish, however, live and work in communities. They are quite happy doing with less, which is simply living the way they think they ought to live. They don't feel deprived. But the idea of having less is frightening to most people. To go without is to be a "loser" in our society. But this, our author says or implies, is the wrong kind of society. We need to change.

To live on less, in other words, rather than being mundane or ordinary, is actually quite extraordinary in our society very much at odds with the mainstream pattern of behavior. And it is a brave step, since it means to move away from the "getting and spending" of Wordsworth's famous poem, by which "we lay waste our powers." Shopping is virtually a national pastime in this country, and if all of a sudden, we found ourselves unemployed or even with less income, a large void would be left in our lives. The ability to savor simple pleasures or common tasks has atrophied in the consumer society, and in this sense it

is fortunate that we have so much work ahead of us because this will give us the time to develop these skills again. Hopefully, when we reach stability sometime in the dim and distant future, we will know how to enjoy it, how to relax and enjoy leisure. . . .

In other words, living on less has a great deal going for it, except one thing—status. It requires a high degree of self-knowledge, the knowledge of what is important to you in your life, and this can be a hard thing in a competitive society that surrounds us with all sorts of pressures to achieve so as to distinguish ourselves from the crowd. Self-knowledge requires that we sit back and ask ourselves just what it is in our life that has really given pleasure and meaning, and then to turn away from those things which have been unrewarding, regardless of the many messages the consumer economy directs at us to make us do otherwise.

For the general reader, this book is a factual and well-argued compendium of the realities which lie ahead—the reasons why we cannot go on as we have in the past—the material, psychological, and moral reasons why far-reaching change is in store for us all. It is the author's friendly attempt to win the reader over to a personal program of deliberate reflection and planning for living in another kind of world. The subtitle of the book is "Returning to Traditional Values in an Age of Scarcity," with emphasis on the positive values of family and community life and the revivification of an ethical point of view. The author looks to hard times and the severe reduction of income to spur human awakening at various levels. He says:

Urban areas will not experience such clear manifestations of community, but economic adversity will encourage many of the same elements. As more of life is lived within neighborhoods, local meeting places will form, and from them will come ideas of how to help neighborhood businesses and craftsmen, how to provide work for young people, and how to avoid high-priced commodities and governmental regulations. Ways to exchange goods and services on an ever smaller basis will appear, which will encourage home production. Social and recreational activities will increasingly evolve around local meeting places—parks, schools, churches, cafes and night spots—rather than large commercial entertainments elsewhere. With more people

knowing each other, crime will be reduced, and the community will be more able to defend itself against those who are perceived as working against the community's interests.

This is community. It is not peaceful and idyllic; it throbs with life—work, talk, dispute, setbacks, success. It is not free from conflict, but the conflict is increasingly with outsiders, which gives the community its unity and identity. . . .

The greatest problem is likely to be that too many individuals will refuse to give up their right to look at society opportunistically, or that community will not be strong enough to defend itself against these opportunists. Community, even if far from perfect, is still the best way to encourage social responsibility, and to give social relations some of the same trust and loyalty found in families and among friends.

Both the strength and the weakness of this book are owed to the level of its thinking. The strength lies in the author's natural capacity to think in terms of the welfare of the whole, of community and humanity, using his considerable imagination to work out in detail the necessities, needs, and interests of the whole in ways that seldom occur to the majority of people, who are exclusively engaged in personal problems. These differences in the way people think and act account for the great social gradations that in history account for the divisions of caste and class, leading, on the one hand, to orders and levels of responsibility, and on the other to exploitation and autocratic tyranny. The remedy chosen by angry men for these abuses is usually over-simplified, since revolutionary leaders appeal for support to the oppressed masses, with the result that, in the name of equality, authoritarian and totalitarian societies are developed in which a low level of atomistic "equality" is made to prevail, with political control by a revolutionary elite which enforces the rules of the order with police and military power. It becomes evident that a structureless society is no society at all, but a politicalized concentration camp such as both Hitler and Stalin brought into being. For the observer, the question becomes: How can we

have structure without tyranny and injustice? How can we have *both* freedom and order?

The twentieth-century answer to this question is that we need to abolish the monstrous nation-state, decentralize both economic and political power, and develop family and community life to the point where people are able to take back responsibilities delegated to the state and begin to live useful, harmonious lives on a human scale in which problems do not become too big to solve.

How shall people become persuaded of these objectives? Warren Johnson hopes that people may be led to adopt them through a restoration of religion and ethics. Yet here, too, we are torn between the impressive power of tradition and the inward sense of need for autonomy and self-determination. Is religion, one may ask, something you take up because you think that both you and the world need it for purposes of meeting our common problems? Earlier in this book the author spoke of the need for self-knowledge. But is there actually an important distinction between self-knowledge and religion? Should we adopt religion because we have finally recognized it as a personal and social necessity, or because it is *true*?

Is religion only a tool or is it an *end*? Are we competent to invent religion for ourselves or must we accept it from others? We want to be free yet we feel dependent on others, and during the past century have made dependence on the external system virtually the law of our lives. Will remedying that bring us the insight to decide about religion and ethics? Do the answers to such questions need to be grown rather than answered by the best and the brightest? A chapter or two along these lines would add considerably to the value of Mr. Johnson's excellent book.

## *COMMENTARY*

### REQUIREMENTS OF CHANGE

WE might start the new year off by asking: How long can we go on as we are now going? Our direction is manifestly toward what is likely to prove some kind of final disaster. On all the tendencies which have discussion in this issue, intelligent opinion is united in this view. Our national policy and our forms of popular entertainment are considered in the lead article, along with sports, and the conclusion is plainly that we are coarsening and corrupting ourselves. No sensible human would allow this to go on in his family affairs, but the requirement of a change in the temper and quality of our culture is hardly mentioned, save by Warren Johnson. (See Review.)

Leon Botstein is outspoken (see "Children") concerning what is happening in our schools, and here, there is at least some action in the form of the home-schooling movement, which is more an activity of a number of determined parents than a "movement," although John Holt, by his books and his paper, *Growing Without Schooling*, has helped to give it the coherence and intercommunication of a movement.

What Ralph Beer says about farming (on page 7) confirms what Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson have been saying for years, and certainly points to the disaster in store for those who work the land the way other people work machines.

Must we say, then, that disaster in the comparatively near future is becoming a certainty? Some measure of disaster is surely a certainty, although there may be more than we think of people out there who, like the parents who have begun to teach their children, are ready to undertake actual changes. What will press them to begin?

We usually change our ways from one of two causes, or a combination of both. We change because the result of what we are doing has become immediately painful. Or we change

because, deep down, we feel that what we are doing is wrong. Already there are those who feel that the familiar way of doing things is wrong and revolting in its effects. These are usually individuals of independent mind, able somehow to devise alternatives for themselves and for perhaps a few friends. We might call them the real pioneers. Then there are those who are already in pain—like the farmers—and who change because they must. What we need most is exemplars who begin to show in individual ways the alternatives that will make a good beginning. This is the way that change may become a trend.



## CHILDREN

### ... and Ourselves

#### TESTERS—AND OUTWITTING THEM

AS we move on into the new year, it seems well to give some attention to the common practices of educators with our children—in particular, the practice of testing and giving examinations. Last year, in an eight-page section on Education (Aug. 23), the *Christian Science Monitor* presented the opinions of several well known educators on testing—for and against. Gregory Anrig, president of the Educational Testing Service, whose tests are widely used in the schools, pointed out that the traditional American commitment to "equal opportunity" and the belief that advancement should be on the basis of achievement are at the root of the popularity of testing. He also says, however, that "no tests that I know of measure important human qualities such as motivation, caring, sensitivity, perseverance, and integrity. They certainly do *not* measure personal worth, the kind of human being a person is or will be."

College admissions tests are said to meet practical problems. Colleges have more applicants than they have room for, and must make choices. "Grades and test scores," Anrig says, "together predict better than either one alone."

But such predictions, others have pointed out, have to do with average performance. They do not apply to the really remarkable students, the Einsteins and Edisons, neither of whom did especially well in school. The schools, in short, are not for geniuses who find the rules applied to them barriers instead of aids. But can't allowance be made for such exceptional students? Of course they can, but only by individual teachers able to recognize the promise of an Einstein or an Edison, not by systems, which take their shape from the performance of average or mediocre students. Good teachers are good because they know the importance of understanding when they should ignore the rules.

In the *Monitor* supplement on education, Leon Botstein, president of Bard College (Annandale-on-Hudson, New York), makes a head-on attack on the sort of testing which now prevails. He says:

America has a passionate attachment to standardized multiple-choice tests. School children learn to take machine-graded uniform tests in kindergarten and first grade. They are taught to select right answers rather than deduce them; to outwit test writers, who attempt to mislead them with seductive but wrong alternatives that otherwise might never have occurred to anyone.

Citing science, objectivity, and uniformity (celebrated as signs of fairness) in our desire to measure intellectual quality and attainment, we have lost touch with common sense. Instead of asking students to show what they understand in a straightforward manner, by demanding that they fill the blank pages of a blue book, solve crucial problems, and answer direct questions, we have erected a tortuous maze of so-called psychometric testing. This maze extends all the way to graduate and professional school. . . .

If, however, schooling is supposed to be training for a productive and reflective life, ought we not be disturbed by the fact that the skills required to do well on standardized multiple-choice tests (unlike the ability to write an essay) become obsolete the very moment schooling is over?

The people who make up the questions, Dr. Botstein says, "are not first-rate national authorities in their fields," so that if a student should know the field better than the questioner he is at a disadvantage. "None of the suggested answers may be right, and often more than one answer can be defended as plausible." Nothing, Botstein says, is learned from the SATs. (Scholastic Aptitude Tests.)

Students do not, as a rule, get the tests back. They never understand why they got something right or wrong. Tests ought to be more than mechanisms of evaluation and selection. Important ones ought to be instruments of learning. . . .

The SATs reinforce a sensibility cultivated by years of adaptation to standardized multiple-choice testing in our schools. We foster the notion that the demonstration of talent and knowledge is an act of

passivity. Using one's intellect becomes little more than the act of selecting from among several answers someone else has put forward.

Students are not active, thinking on their own, demonstrating understanding in their own words, presenting knowledge digested and remembered in a manner comprehensible to authorities who can judge the range of quality in answers and the sophistication in reasoning. The SATs and other timed multiple-choice tests reinforce the ludicrous belief that speed and facile recall are signs of intellectual superiority and talent. . . .

Amid periodic controversies about the SATs and their meaning, no one seems to have asked why many who score high on the verbal component still cannot write a decent essay in freshman English and worse, have little to write about after 12 years of schooling; why those who score in the top percentiles of the mathematics component may not know any mathematics and are often not the most gifted future scientists, engineers, and theoretical mathematicians.

The system that we use, in other words, is imperfect, flawed, and almost certainly harmful. Talented critics have pointed out its defects again and again. A leading mathematician, Banesh Hoffman, biographer of Einstein, Mr. Botstein notes, wrote a devastating critique of the SATs in 1964, yet "the quasi-religious faith in the SATs displayed by their designers, educators, and the public has, if anything, increased."

Well, there are of course other sorts of tests, the ones put together by teachers in high school and college, which require the composition of essays—what about them?

The question recalls something that happened in Harvard University back in 1947. (We quote from an extract from *Examining in Harvard College*—a collection of essays by Harvard professors.) In "Examsmanship and the Liberal Arts," the writer, William Perry, Jr., tells about a bright student, standing in the hall, who asked another student what he was going to be examined in that day, in a nearby room. His friend said "Soc. Sci. Something-or-other." The student, Metzger (not his real name), wanted to know more, and his friend said the course was

about "Modern Perspectives on Man and Society," using a very good book. Feeling curious, Metzger decided to go in and take the test, signing his blue book, "George Smith," and it turned out that a student named Smith had not shown up for the test, so that Metzger earned an A—from an admiring reader who did the grading of the examination papers. Metzger's friend happened to notice the grade gained by Metzger and the grader's comment, "Excellent work" at the end. The story was too good to keep and the Harvard *Crimson* told the whole tale, with dire consequences for the unhappy grader and an "admonishment" to Metzger. The point of course is, how did Metzger seem to earn both praise and grade? He blew the "fact" questions, never having even heard of the book studied in the course, but his reply to the "essay" question was a masterpiece. Metzger, Perry says, for the essay question, chose to write about Geoffrey Gorer instead of Margaret Mead, the other possibility. Defending both Metzger and the grader, Perry says:

. . . he [Metzger] took his first cue from the name Geoffrey, and committed his strategy to the premise that Gorer was born into an "Anglo-Saxon" culture, probably English, but certainly English-speaking. Having heard that Margaret Mead was a social anthropologist, he inferred that Gorer was the same. He then entered upon his essay, centering his inquiry upon what he supposed might be the problems inherent in an anthropologist's observation of a allure which was his own, or nearly his own. Drawing part from memories of table talk [an important part of Harvard's education takes place during meals in the Houses] on cultural relativity and in part from creative logic, he rang changes on the relation of observer to observed, and assessed the kind and degree of objectivity which might accrue to an observer through training as an anthropologist.

There is more—a lot more—that Metzger did to prove his sophistication and grasp of what he was writing about, but as Perry admits, it was in fact all simply *bull*, yet very *good bull*. Perry argues:

If a liberal education should teach students "how to think," not only in their own fields but in fields

outside their own—that is, to understand "how the other fellow orders his knowledge," then bulling, even in its purest form, expresses an important part of what a pluralist university holds dear, surely a more important part than the collecting of "facts that are facts" which school boys learn to do. Here then, good bull is therefore of more value than "facts," which, without a frame of reference, are not even "true" at all.

So Metzger is vindicated as a bright lad who had learned his lessons well. Can we say the same of the examination system? The real verdict, perhaps, comes from F. R. Leavis, who remarks in one of his books that good grades obtained in examinations come to students possessed of journalistic skills, which may prove a serious handicap to real scholars.

It seems evident that Metzger accomplished what he did through a kind of cleverness which can be used in the manufacture of effective "bull" and in other perhaps more useful ways. But is a university education intended to develop this sort of cleverness, or does one go to Harvard to learn such skills? Does higher education achieve its ends by teaching young men how to pass examinations and obtain high grades? This is a question Mr. Perry does not discuss.

## FRONTIERS

### The Spread of Appropriate Technology

THE Intermediate Technology Development Group in London, now a large and active organization, has inherited many of the practical qualities of its founder, E. F. Schumacher. This is at once evident in the recent publication, *The AT Reader—Theory and Practice in Appropriate Technology*, a volume of 468 pages edited by Marilyn Carr. The American edition is issued by the Intermediate Technology Development Group of North America, and copies may be purchased from this group at \$19.50 (plus \$2 for shipping) at P.O. Box 337, Croton-on-Hudson, New York 10520. The book makes good reading for anyone interested in the development of human-scale technology in both the Third and the First Worlds. The essays by various contributors are nearly all brief, all by writers who are profoundly concerned with helping the underprivileged and the poor to become independent and self-supporting.

George McRobie, co-founder with Schumacher of ITDG, says of the book:

There is material here, I believe, to convince even the most skeptical and wary politicians and aid administrators in both aid-giving and aid-receiving countries, that there is now a viable, low-cost and effective alternative to conventional aid and development programs—which, as far as the world's poor are concerned, represent some 25 years of costly failures and neglect. Nor is there much point in agitating for more aid without insisting on a change in the quality of aid. . . . If what was lacking was the evidence that appropriate technology works, and that it should be the central focus of development strategies and programs, then this book provides that evidence.

One encouraging reality, not entirely appreciated, is the fact that Schumacher's ideas have gradually been gaining a large audience and are finally taking hold. A contributor to the book, Nicolas Jequier, remarks:

In their early days, many AT groups relished their position as outsiders and as critics of the existing order of things and this marginality was in

fact the necessary condition for innovation and originality. Now that Schumacher's ideas are so widely known, and indeed so actively embraced in many of the ruling elites throughout the world, this political marginality of the early days is no longer necessary, and could indeed be counter-productive. Several AT groups have already sensed this intuitively and now work more closely with large industrial firms, international development banks, government ministries and national planning agencies. What makes this cooperation so much easier today than it would have been ten years ago, is the new, large network of AT sympathizers within the establishment. These sympathizers are for the most part people who have read *Small Is Beautiful* and understood its message, and who, like the termites in a building are inconspicuously eating away the wooden certitudes of high technology and the belief that "Big is Better."

The short papers throughout the book tell about methods of food production and food processing, care of livestock, water supply and sanitation, wood fuel, stoves, and renewable energy. Other sections deal with intermediate technology for housing, roads, bridges, and transport. There is plenty of generalized theory by individuals who have for years been engaged in this work, along with discussions of educational policy. Small-scale manufacturing and mining have attention, also recycling.

One two-page essay, by Susan Rifkin, that captured our attention is on health care in China. Information of this sort ought to be more widely spread around. Actually, none of the information in this volume is politically motivated, giving the reader both pleasure and confidence in the contents. This writer says:

In the pre-1949 period, China was a country whose mortality figures attested to the depths of human poverty and suffering. The first years of the Communist revolution drastically changed that picture. By 1956 China had virtually eradicated the most prevalent communicable diseases including smallpox, scarlet fever, diphtheria, and cholera; had built a strong preventive network in both urban and rural areas; and had extended and expanded health care to the majority of its 500 million people. This had all been done without large investments in

building new hospitals, in training doctors or in buying sophisticated drugs or medical technologies.

The Chinese model was built on four health care principles. The first was the absolute commitment to provide some type of health care to everyone regardless of position, location or ability to pay. Private practice was abolished. Government facilities were consolidated. Services were decentralized. Priority was placed on health care in the rural areas where over eighty percent of China's people lived. Mobile medical teams of specialists from urban areas were sent to serve and teach in remote areas with the purposes of both distributing health care and acquainting city doctors with the diseases most common to China's rural people.

The second principle was that prevention was to receive priority. Resources were not allocated to support large research institutions, send medical personnel abroad to receive advanced training or build more large, highly sophisticated curative centers. Rather, money, manpower and materials were mobilized to build a strong preventive network in both urban and rural areas. . . . Health education was emphasized. The thrust was to improve the living environment, housing and nutrition so people once cured did not merely return to the very conditions which caused their disease in the first place. . . .

The third principle was to unite Western and traditional Chinese medicine. The Chinese saw the value of both the 500,000 existing Chinese medical practitioners (as compared with the 20,000 Western trained doctors), and the medicines and treatments they utilized. Chinese medical care was affordable, accessible and acceptable to the majority of Chinese people. Rather than depending upon a mass influx of foreign aid to provide Western medical facilities, or putting all scarce resources into the very expensive training of a relatively few Western-type medical personnel, the Chinese opted to use the existing resources in both medical traditions to deliver health care to the people.

The final principle and perhaps the one which most fired the imagination in other countries was that of community participation in health. This idea took several forms. The most widespread was the mass campaigns where all people in all production units participated in ridding the country of disease factors such as rats, flies, and bedbugs, sweeping the streets and cleaning them of rubbish, treating VD cases and digging irrigation canals to bury snails which carried schistosomiasis. These campaigns provided vehicles

for mass health education and experience in the eradication of disease. . . .

The Chinese health care model was preventive, decentralized, rural-based and labor-intensive. It defined health as not only the absence of disease but as a total improvement in the life of the individuals.

Mao may have made some mistakes, but this was not one of them.