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KINDERGARTEN DAYS

NO effort is so persistent in human life as the quest for certainty. John Dewey recognized this and made it the title of a book which embodied the conclusions of a lifetime of thinking. We must eat, too, of course, and find shelter, but humans are the sort of beings who, whenever they get a little free time, wonder what meaning their lives have beyond these practical considerations. We can't help it; we must do it; and many of the confusions and conflicts in our affairs arise from the different opinions we adopt on the means to certainty. Great waves of more or less unified opinion are identified as ideological faiths. There is the view, for example, that human life is best arranged as some sort of well-managed Animal Farm, in which everyone has enough to eat, and where, as a result, the pursuit of the Higher Things will become possible for all. The moral dynamic for this, vastly appealing in a manifestly hungry world, is that *everybody* will have enough to eat and enough other necessary things. But, unhappily, the planning of a material Utopia becomes so complicated, so insistent on its requirement of absolute power to do the needful, that the Higher Things are practically forgotten in the process, and we find that, once the power is achieved, they have become totally inaccessible.

How, then, does one put the ideal things, the visionary and ennobling things, together with the practical necessities, the commonplace decencies, of living in the world? That is the great question.

Well, *now* it is the great question. We have other talents than the pursuit of truth, and during centuries when their exercise has priority we leave philosophy to the experts and get on toward more immediate objectives. If you want to migrate from the Old World to America, you need a ship with a reliable navigator and sailors that know their craft. Your idea of Truth has become a piece of land in an inviting and unowned countryside. And after you get the land and have learned how to grow good crops, you begin to look around for people with other skills—blacksmiths, brickmakers, gunsmiths, and technical experts such as surveyors, etc. You'll also want a preacher or two, since having a church is the thing to do. The preacher looks after Truth while you are busy with real-life matters.

Consider those who are remembered as the Great Men, century after century. Their work is not always the same. First come explorers, colonizers, intrepid pioneers. After that, empire builders. Then the traders and industrialists. And then, because great industry and economic power bring social problems that no one can see a way to solving, come the ideologists. In such a period, Reality is no longer geographic, no longer a matter of technological achievement, but Political. The elaboration of Utopian dreams becomes compulsive. At the same time the talkers, the propagandists, the manipulators and the demagogues take the stage. The practical world is so tightly managed by those who have power that more and more people begin living in the future. They see nothing good anywhere about them. Only a revolution, a *total* revolution, will satisfy their needs. Having been deprived so long of responsibility, they have lost touch with the practical man's sixth-sense awareness of how things work. If you tell them this, they regard you with contempt. What does *he* know about human need? they ask. What does *he* care about the suffering and injustice in the world? Unfortunately, most of the time, the questions are in order, their implied judgments correct. So the practical men are ignored.

Well, we have had some attempts at total revolution. For the most part, we do not think highly of their result. Even the people who live under these regimes do not like them very well,

but dare not say so. But there, as elsewhere, there is a complex mix of opinion. To really know how people think, it is necessary to live with them, take part in their lives for quite a while. The more you understand, the less confident you become of simple, conclusive judgments. Yet some things are nonetheless very wrong—almost everywhere.

What can we say about all this? Well, we live in an age in which a great many people dream about social perfection, yet feel and are betrayed when they move in some organized way to attain it. The question of *who* betrays them—themselves or conniving politicians—has not been settled. Perhaps it need not be, since it always happens, anyway. Surely we have lived through enough of the period of ideologically manipulated events to be fairly certain of this.

A question as yet unanswered—as yet hardly inspected—is: What proportion of our troubles is due to the downright cussedness of human beings and how much results from the inevitable conditions of human life? Probably we can't separate these factors with any clarity, but there *is* a difference between them. Man in the wilderness has a tough time. Man in the social wilderness has a tough time. The difference is that man in the natural wilderness has no one to blame for his troubles. He doesn't kick at the rocks or indict the hurricane; they don't know any better; they are not moral entities to be reproached and punished. What man would think of charging the dancing electrons with moral indifference because he is hungry or disappointed in love? (There is a sort of religion which encourages such outlets, but we can't discuss that here.)

Humans, however, have a moral sense, and, whatever they do, you can see how they might have done better: they're perfect scapegoats. It feels good to tell other people what is wrong with them, and, most of the time, they seem to deserve what is said. Does it do any good to tell them? How many people, when confronted by their wrong actions, thank their critics and change? Being human, they enjoy feeling righteous, too, so mostly they find something wrong with their critics. How much of the din of controversy is owing to this situation?

What may be the shortcoming of this mode of analysis? Well, it eventually takes you to the French apothegm: To understand all is to forgive all . . . which is held to mean that you go home and have your dinner, read the paper, and do nothing about what's wrong with the world. The alternative seems to be to swell with the feelings of ennoblement generated by righteous anger and tell people what is wrong with them, no *matter what.* We can't *wait!* Education is too *slow!* These people are *evil!* We don't want to hurt or kill anyone, but, I ask you, how long can these things go on? The trivial little reforms allowed by the people in power aren't *good* enough! The whole system needs to be replaced!

There is irony upon irony in this sort of "dialogue." People stop being human if they become indifferent to utopian dreams. But they usually become tyrants if they try to enact such dreams. It is right to hate compromise settlements in moral issues. Yet it is wrong to try to force moral decisions on others. Enforced morality is a contradiction in terms, since compelled decisions are not moral at all but only submissions to might.

On the other hand, the Gradualist is open to the charge of being an apologist for the status quo. He is a fellow who says: Don't rock the boat, don't get in the way of the good things that may happen through well-considered persuasion. The gradualist is a *reformer,* which is almost as bad as being a paid flunky of the bosses.

Well, there may be some truth-content in what the gradualist says, as well as some political ambiguity that can be manipulated in various ways. In our time, when political argument reigns supreme, nobody looks for truth, but only for means to power. Truth is for arm-chair philosophers. We have to change the world, not think about it. Yet the truth is still there, and the time comes when it reveals the results of ill-considered action. What is ill-considered action?

Action energized by frenzied moral emotion, totally disdainful of the tolerances and constraints of the human condition.

This sort of criticism is offered by Jean-François Revel in W*ithout Marx or Jesus.* In what we shall quote he is defending gradualism or, in his language, Liberalism. Is anyone so foolhardy today as to defend liberalism? Let us see what he says:

> It is so widely accepted that political democracy tends toward economic democracy that totalitarian states find it necessary to suppress the former in order to prevent the latter. The strategy of such states, as we know, is to win over the workers by paternalism and popularism, and by coming out against bourgeois "corruption." And, at the same time, to revoke the rights of labor: the right to unionize, to assemble, to strike, to petition, and to vote. It is also wrong to affirm, as many leftists and radicals are doing today, that liberalism and fascism are identical; and this holds true even of "repressive" liberalism, in the meaning Marcuse attaches to that term. According to the intellectuals who preach that politically irresponsible thesis, liberal capitalism is even more dangerous than fascism, because it has the *appearance* of democracy. It is sufficient to note here that, in those countries that have known real fascism, no one subscribes to such a thesis. Italian workers, for example, know only too well that a strike under Mussolini was very different from a strike under de Gasperi.
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> Revolution consists in transforming reality. The real counter-revolutionaries are therefore those self-styled revolutionary purists who reject all change on the pretext that it is not complete, and that it is taking place "within the system." Under those conditions, there would never have been any social changes at all. When Nero passed a law giving slaves legal recourse against the abuses of their masters, the Romans would have had to reject that reform, one imagines, because it was taking place "within the system," and because it was predicated upon the existence of slavery. And today, if we followed the same reasoning, we would have to reject the concept of profit-sharing, since it gives workers a certain control over real profits and therefore over the direction of the economy, because profit-sharing operates within the system. That profit-sharing can be a factor in changing the whole system never seems to occur to these Platonic revolutionaries. They are too accustomed to thinking of things as pure forms and separate essences, all neatly filed away in separate categories. And, worst of all, they do this in the name of history and of dialectics.

Well, what would Revel have us do? Relax and endure the inadequate processes of the inch-by-inch reformers? Not exactly. He proposes, of all things: Watch America! American youth, he suggests, are showing the way. This romanticizing of the "American Way" outrages Mary McCarthy, a qualified admirer of Mr. Revel, and in an Afterword to his book she asks, "who arranges the transfer of power?" Whatever has happened thus far, it isn't good enough:

> Revel bases much of his hope on the fact, indeed impressive, that the protest movement drove Johnson from office. Yes. But it did not end the war. The sad truth seems to be that whatever else the protest movement can accomplish—organizing marches and student strikes, draft-card burnings, moratoria, sending resisters to Canada and deserters to Sweden, blocking defense-research contracts in universities, promoting beards and long hair, the sale of love beads, pot consumption—what it cannot accomplish is the very purpose that brought it into being.
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> It looks as if nothing inside the country can do that, short of revolution (and not the gradual kind Jean-François means) or a massive economic depression. Or the second leading to the first.

Revel's reply seems distilled common sense—a quality unlikely to involve anybody in a bloody crusade:

> When Mary McCarthy . . . objects that the opposition has not been able to bring the Vietnam war to an immediate halt, I must reply that it was impossible for it to do so. Never, in any country, has internal pressure been able to have an immediate effect on foreign policy; and the reason is that, in the value system taught in the Nation-State, the notion of "patriotism" is paramount. Even so, never before, in any country, has there been so much internal pressure directed against foreign policy, and never before has that pressure accomplished so much, as in the United States in the sixties. . . .
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> Before a revolution resulting in real equality can take place, a liberal political revolution must be effective in the *mores* of a nation. For this reason, the "complete destruction of the system," that one hears

> so much about, could only result in the. establishment of a dictatorship. We are back to the reform-revolution dichotomy, according to which anything less than "total destruction" may be classified as reform. This is a wholly abstract notion, akin to the need for a religious resurrection. To say, "I refuse to do anything within this terrible system," is the same as saying, "I refuse to do anything for this sick man because he is not in good health."

Mary McCarthy might say to this, "But bandaids do not really help him; they cruelly deceive him by pretending to treat a mortal disease."

There we leave this argument, which can be taken no further. On the one hand are the people who "try," but aren't doing enough good, and on the other are the people with total remedies that absolutely no one can know will work, or at what cost.

It was by reason of this dilemma—as old as *thinking* man—that Plato withdrew from politics and gave the rest of his life to finding out how people think. Our problems, quite evidently, lie in this area. If there could be general knowledge concerning how people think—why they are occasionally right but most of the time wrong, and why deciding between good and bad thinking is such an obscure matter—we could probably settle all our practical problems in short order and get on to the Higher Things.

Plato, having reached the same conclusion as Jean-François Revel, decided that messing with politics would get nowhere worth getting to so long as the *mores* of Greece, more particularly Athens, remained unchanged. *Mores* govern the way people make up their minds.

How did the Athenians make up their minds? Plato knew the Athenians pretty well. He saw that Homer, for the most part, and some of the other traditional poets, had determined how Athenians think. The Greeks, he argued, needed to get out of the hypnotic state induced by Homer's lyrical and rhythmic Tribal Encyclopedia. Separate yourself from the psychic content of your mind and feelings, he said, and take a good look at that content. See how it makes you do what you do. Do you really want to do that? What will it lead to? Obviously, you can't be independent without first gaining the *capacity* for independence: This means becoming philosophers.

Earlier we noted that human beings have various skills. We do a lot of things pretty well. As we do them—we *need* to do a lot of things such as growing food, building houses—take these "necessities" as far as you like—we become good at them and quite proud of what we can do. This was also the background of the archaic age of Greece. The poets and singers celebrated what the Greeks knew how to do. They were great craftsmen and became very good warriors—look at Achilles! *That's* how a real Greek behaves! The Greeks were heroes in the skills of peace and war. But then came the singers, the culture-shapers, the "ideologists" and dictators of morals and civic fashions. Another change, however, was in store. Things were in a mess, Plato said, because everyone simply believes the poets, follows what they teach without thinking about whether it is good or bad. Such people, he argued, have no independent identity. They are all cast in a common mold, being manipulated by the poets. So another great transition took place. The poetic teachers of the race were replaced by the critical analysts, the *Sophists.* Thinking went from poetry to prose. You can't sing criticism. For criticism you have to get above emotion. No good critic allows himself to be carried away. As Eric Havelock says in *The Preface to Plato:*

> With the slow transition from verse to prose and from concrete to abstract the man of intelligence came to represent the master of a new form of communication equally consecrated to educational purposes, but now anti-poetic. . . .
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> Both pre-Socratics and Sophists then, by the close of the fifth century before Christ, if the *Apology* does indeed reproduce the idiom of that period, were accepted by public opinion as representative of the intellectualist movement. If they were called "philosophers," it was not for their doctrines as such, but for the kind of vocabulary and syntax which they used and the unfamiliar psychic energies that they

represented. Sophists, pre-Socratics, and Socrates had one fatal characteristic in common; they were trying to discover and to practice abstract thinking. The Socratic dialectic pursued this goal with more energy, and perhaps insisted more ruthlessly that it was along this path and this alone that the new educational programme must be conducted. That was why the lightning of public opprobrium struck Socrates down.

If you want to be popular, learn well the slogans of the Tribal Encyclopedia, even set them to music. If you want to be intellectual and elitist semi-popular, become a Sophist, so that, if Pericles were among us, he might say of you, "We Athenians can intellectualize without sacrifice of manliness." But if you want to understand how people think, you follow Socrates and get into trouble as he did. The quest for certainty is still with us, and we seem not to be any nearer the goal than the Sophists of Plato's time. We still need to understand how we think. Why is it so difficult? Because of the extraordinary reach of our ideal thinking and, at the same time, the extraordinary skill of our practical thinking—which two skills constantly get in each other's way, generating endless and apparently irreconcilable differences in how we think.

We should note that Revel accuses the revolutionary ideologists of being Platonic dreamers, secure in their vision of how everything will be when they are in control. It will have to be *perfect*, as all is perfect in the Platonic world of ideas. No compromises, no half-measures. We are going to create heaven on earth, and have it right now, they say.

Well, there are other ways of drawing on the Platonic world of perfect ideas. Simone Weil's book, *The Need for Roots*, is a fine example. You keep wondering how anyone could make her French Utopia work. Yet it is a magnificent picture of how things ought to be. The logic is so sound, the dream so entrancing, that you are embarrassed to ask her how she supposes it could come about. The question would seem profane. You are in the presence of a sybil, not a terrorist who will shoot you if you don't do as he says. Both operate in the context of a dream, but the notions of realization are poles apart. You know that much, even if the man with the gun tells you what he proposes to do, while Simone Weil never utters a word on the subject.

We can say this: *We have to have dreams!* Sometimes, in theory, we admit that the way of realizing a dream must be consistent in quality with the realization, but usually can't think what this means for our backward-moving, messed up world. We have to have songs, too, and poets to compose and sing them. And we have to have craftsmen to help us with our intermediate technology and all that. But the balance among these skills we are so good at depends on the Socratic element in our lives—our understanding of how we think. We are still beginners at this.

REVIEW
LOADED WITH PROMISE

WHEN YOU break a law you suffer the penalty. This is the common sense of experience, a theme with many variations. As ye sow, so shall ye reap, is one variation. Those whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad, is less obviously another.

We are speaking, of course, of the "laws of nature," of the existence of which there is very little doubt. Everyone agrees that there *are* laws of nature, the difficulty being to say *what* they are. A strong tendency in human nature is to do exactly what we want or feel like doing, and then to inspect the cosmos for evidence that Nature approves. We rejoice to think that in pleasing ourselves we are carrying out Nature's mandates. Social Darwinism is an epithet used to identify this tendency. Might is right, people say, because the survival of the fittest is the law of nature. And so on.

What does it take to discover the laws of nature? We have only uncertain answers to this question. Great swings of the pendulum of opinion characterize the human search for knowledge. Collective opinion is stubborn, lethargic, and very hard to change. An ingenious experimentalist may discover what he believes to be a law of nature, gather and present evidence for it, and then find that he can't even get people to look at the evidence, much less duplicate his work. Only when the evidence accumulates to absolutely indisputable dimensions do people—most people—start looking around and wondering what it means. Do today's mounting disorders represent some kind of a *law* we have been ignoring? they begin to ask.

To illustrate: Early in this century a biologist named Albert Howard began accumulating evidence for what he later identified as *"the law of return."* In time it became the foundation principle of what we now call organic gardening. Howard's formulation (in *The Soil and Health*, first published in this country in 1947) seems so important that we give it briefly here:

> *The first duty of the agriculturalist must always be to understand that he is a part of Nature and cannot escape from his environment.* He must therefore obey Nature's rules. . . . The final proviso is of the utmost importance; we must give back what we take out; we must restore what we have seized; if we have stopped the Wheel of Life for a moment, we must set it spinning again. . . .

This was Howard's statement of the Law of Return—restore to the soil the wastes left after we have enjoyed the fruits of nature's abundance—or pay the price. It hardly needs pointing out that we have not been obeying this law. Our agriculture takes from the soil organic riches we call food, but puts back mainly chemicals and poisons. This seems to work, or has worked for a time, making us apparently successful in outwitting the law of return with our scientific expertise. The stimulation of chemicals and the control of pests by poisons gave what seemed great crops. As Howard summarized:

> The argument is based on figures of increased crop and animal production over the last few generations of human life and ignores the fact that *these results depend upon plunder of the capital of the soil.* The conclusions reached are fundamentally erroneous and are fraught with the certainty of failure and catastrophe.

Well, did anyone give attention to what Howard was saying, years ago? A few people listened and began studying the law of return. Howard's writings tell what they did and accomplished. There is more on how this law works in publications like *Organic Gardening and Farming.* But some of those who ought to listen to Howard are still ignoring him, still disputing and ridiculing the law of return. Several years ago a MANAS reviewer tried to get a professor of internal medicine and pediatrics to read Howard's book. "It's not scientific," he said. He, of course, had read other books which had the effect of closing his mind. He wasn't asked to *believe* Howard's book, just read it. Well, he took it, but almost lost it instead of reading it. There must be

others like him, judging from what we now read about the medical profession.

Yet opinion is slowly improving. The Law of Return is getting more and more respectful attention from professional people, and from concerned scientists, too. In a thoughtful study of the history of the ecology movement, *Nature's Economy*, published by the Sierra Club ($15.00), Donald Worster finds a great change going on in scientific thinking:

> There has emerged from this movement a renewed attack on scientific methodology for its reductive tendencies. Ecologists have insisted that scientists today are in danger of ignoring the complex whole of nature, the quality of organic interrelatedness that defies analysis by the physicist or chemist. . . . Human interventions in nature, including planetary insults by radioactivity and pesticides, have gone unchecked because scientists have failed to understand their effects on the whole as well as on isolated parts.
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> Technological progress has become an even more popular target of the ecology movement. . . . What is especially surprising in this course of events is that the campaign against technological growth has been led not by poets or artists as in the past, but by individuals within the scientific community. So accustomed are we to assume that scientists are generically partisans of the entire ideology of progress, happily adjusted above all others to the machine culture, that the ecology movement has created a vast shock wave of reassessment of the scientist's place in society. Ecologists now find themselves not only marching in the vanguard of anti-technology forces but also serving as teachers for a new generation intent on recovering a sense of the sacred in nature. No wonder, then, that at least one ecologist, Paul Sears, has called his field "a subversive subject." With remarkable suddenness it has mounted a powerful threat to established assumptions in society and in economics, religion, and the humanities, as well as the other sciences and their ways of doing business.

Violation of the Law of Return has at least two aspects. First, of course, is the depletion of the soil. We are not putting back what we took out—the vital leftovers of consumption. At the same time the method of mining the soil, ignoring its obvious as well as its subtler needs, mutilates the planet in various ways. There is eutrofication of streams and lakes, harm to birds and bees, while the disasters of monocropping are becoming evident.

The other side of the picture is what happens to the wastes we don't return. Recently MANAS had a story in Frontiers (Nov. 9) on the *water* we don't return. Philadelphia, for example, gets 45 inches of rainfall annually, totalling 122 billion gallons. *None* of it is *used;* none of it gets back into the soil. The runoff from the city is "poured away, unused and polluted," as Malcolm Wells says, "into the city's two vile rivers." The city goes upstream for its annual water needs—195 billion gallons. "It drinks diluted sewage and throws its rainwater away."

> But don't blame the Philadelphians [Malcolm Wells adds]. They do only what you and I and the people of Tokyo and Chicago are doing. We've all waterproofed ourselves so that the rain just can't soak in. We've changed the very nature of entire continents.

What about the rest of the things we are not returning to the land? We have from a friend a book by Katie Kelly called *Garbage*, published in 1973 by the Saturday Review Press. Think of it! A book all about garbage. Who would buy that? Who would want to read it? Well, people had better read it, since it recites in completely horrible detail the penalties they pay for breaking a law of nature. Facts, figures, and outrage boil out of Katie Kelly in about equal proportion:

> America produces over 360 million tons of garbage per year. No other country can begin to approach the amount of garbage generated by an alert and dedicated populace such as ours. This figures out to approximately 10 pounds a day or 1.8 tons per year for each and every one of us. (India can scratch up only 200 pounds per year per person. Imagine how the Indians must feel. It is one thing to own the Taj Mahal; it is another to produce only 200 pounds of garbage a year.
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> Three-hundred-and-sixty million tons of garbage. That is enough garbage to fill 5 million trailer trucks, which, if placed end to end, would stretch around the world twice. To shovel this pile of

> garbage out of harm's way costs American taxpayers $3.7 billion a year.
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> We spend only $130 million a year on urban transit, only $1 billion on urban renewal, only $1.5 billion on medical research, only $2.5 trillion on food stamps and other nutrition programs.
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> Lest anyone think we have peaked in garbage production, that 360 million tons of garbage we hardworking Americans produce per year will look like a very small hill of beans indeed compared to what we will be doing in 1980, when that yearly mound will hit an impressive peak of 440 million tons of solid waste per year. That, folks, is a lot of garbage.

What sort of garbage we produce, where it goes, even how it smells, is spelled out inadequate detail (full detail would require twenty volumes) in the 225 pages of Katie Kelly's book. She is a serious campaigner against every sort of pollution, especially packaging pollution. In the supermarkets she rips the paper and board off her groceries and leaves them on the check-off counter—to the irritation and edification of the cashier. She reports the emergence of a new culture hero—the Garbage Star, usually a politician who declares his determination to solve the Garbage Problem.

This book helps to justify the daring of Rodale Press in publishing this year two other volumes—one called *Sensible Sludge* ($5.95), by Jerome Goldstein (executive editor of *Organic Gardening*), the other, *Biological Reclamation of Solid Wastes* ($5.95), by Clarence G. Golueke. All we are able to say about Mr. Golueke's book is that its author has the right credentials and must know what he is talking about. People who want or need to know what can be done on a municipal scale, now and in the future, to obey the law of return, in spite of all our terrible mistakes, should read this book. Biological reclamation means putting wastes back into the life cycle instead of letting them lie around as pollutants of earth, air, and water. Much science is involved—the kind of science (and technology) we need.

Sensible Sludge, subtitled "A New Look at a Wasted Natural Resource," will serve the general reader well. It is filled with information about what intelligent people and communities, and even a big city like Chicago, are doing to fulfill the law of return. Mr. Goldstein doesn't quite give sludge romantic content, but shows it to be loaded with promise, nonetheless.

COMMENTARY
IT'S MORE SERIOUS NOW

THERE are two ways to think about the common good. One is to decide what it is necessary to make everybody do, by writing a constitution. The other is to give an account of what people need to do that they cannot be compelled to do—a much more difficult kind of thinking.

The quotation from John Holt in this week's "Children" involves both kinds of thinking. After many years of working with children of various ages, Mr. Holt is convinced that the attempt to "compel" education is bound to fail. Compulsory education works against the young, and after a while we see that it works against society, too.

It is necessary, Holt says, for parents to replace coercive methods with their own acts of the imagination. People *can* teach their own children. They are not as helpless as they think. This sort of restoration of confidence, Holt believes, is at the root of restoration of society. No doubt it will take time, but that hardly matters if it is the only thing to do.

Mr. Holt has few illusions. He thinks that the people who, like himself, no longer believe in compulsory education may be about 1% of the population, but that doesn't discourage him so long as this minority seems to be growing.

Teaching one's own children is bound to have one good effect: any effort in this direction will stimulate the imagination. And with the collapse of confidence in the "factual certainties" of modern knowledge—so misleading, so inadequate, so deceptive—we are going to need powers of imagination more than anything else. The situation is exactly as Saul Bellow (also quoted in "Children") says:

> What I am saying is that the accounts of human existence given by the modern intelligence are very shallow by comparison with those that the imagination is capable of giving, and that we should by no means agree to limit imagination by committing ourselves to the formulae of modern intelligence but continue as individuals to make free individual judgments.
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> Wordsworth warned that we lay waste our powers by getting and spending. It is more serious than that now. Worse than getting and spending, modern distraction, worldwide irrationality, and madness threaten existence itself. We may not make it.

Thus teachers and artists agree: the uncompelled exercise of the imagination has been almost wholly neglected by a nation of law-makers. Freedom is not assured by passing laws, but by using those of our powers which cannot be coerced.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
INSTEAD OF FACTS

NOTHING is so often debated, these days, as the idea of knowledge. We are by no means sure, any more, what knowledge is. Early in the century most people were confident they knew. Get the facts, they said. "Facts, justly arranged, interpret themselves." This leads to the student battle cry of the 60s*: Relevance.* How is relevance determined? Which facts do you justly arrange?

Relevance is plainly a matter of opinion. For the scientist, relevance is determined by his hypothesis, by what he is trying to find out. But this is confinement—a necessary confinement, the scientist will point out, yet all the same confinement. Some very important discoveries were complete accidents—not anything to do with what was being looked for or done at the time. Radioactivity is an example. We both find and ignore knowledge by using hypotheses.

Facts, moreover, are not naked realities. They did not even achieve factual status until ideas were attached to them, as Whitehead long ago pointed out. It was the ideas which supplied their "relevance."

An entire issue of the journal of the General Semanticists, *Et Cetera* (September, 1977), is devoted to the facets of this problem. A number of contributors write on "The Biases of Research," and one of them, a professor of Communication, Paula Kurman, has this to say:

> *Reality Is Not Directly Experienced but Mediated Through the Use of Symbols.* This thought has powerful, reverberating impact. Language, as a mediating symbolic behavior, deletes, distorts, and generalizes about reality. If one accepts these statements and the assumptions which support them then it follows that reality as an undiluted totality is unknowable.
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> What then is real, or true? And what is a fact? Does agreement make it so? As Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch point out, "On reflection it becomes obvious that anything is real only to the extent that it conforms to a *definition* of reality—and those definitions are legion." Thus we begin to come around, perhaps with some sense of discomfort, to the notion of facts and truths as relative perspectives, relative specifically to the perceptual mechanisms and symbolic systems of the observer.
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> But what about objectivity, and the scientific method? At the risk of horrifying the sensibilities of some, it must be logically concluded from the above that objectivity is a linguistic creation, a myth endorsed by the scientific community, an unattainable absolute.
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> Here the reader may very well throw up his hands and comment scornfully, "Then you are suggesting that scientific investigation is a useless endeavor, since one cannot prove anything. Not at all. . . . Why not reframe this limited perspective to one more expansive and equally compatible with human experience? This (research finding) appears valid in this context, and *this* perspective of the same problem, although different, also appears valid, and . . ., and . . .etc. . . . A shift of perspective is not a violation of the true order of things, but a viable alternative.

This seems helpful, but hardly consoling to one who has been in the habit of seeking security in scientific fact. The facts no longer compel assent. They are, after all, only "perspectives." Their color, bearing, and significance depend upon "the perceptual mechanisms and symbolic systems of the observer."

What then is it legitimate to teach to children? For answer, we might as well go back to the medieval scholastic, John of Salisbury, who said:

> Those to whom the system of the Trivium has disclosed the significance of all words, or the rules of the Quadrivium have unveiled the secrets of nature, do not need the help of a teacher in order to understand the meaning of books and to find the solution of questions.

The Trivium of the medieval schools included grammar, logic, and rhetoric. The Quadrivium consisted of arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. Together they make the Seven Arts, a curriculum that is hard to beat. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are indeed the core. They are the

tools for obtaining knowledge, and far more important, therefore, than any temporary item of supposed "reality." The goal, obviously enough, according to John of Salisbury, is freedom from authority. This was also Tolstoy's view. The business of the teacher is to make his students *independent* of his teaching. Facts are infinite and all relative, while the measures of relevance vary with motive and purpose. Agreeably to Solzhenitsyn, therefore, the good teacher will keep his instruction as free as possible from ideology. What then would the young learn? They would learn to think and to want to know.

There is of course a lot more to be said on such questions. Writing on "A World Too Much with Us" (in *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn, 1975), Saul Bellow, an artist, says in effect what the *Et Cetera* writer said, and goes on from there.

> Experts know certain things well. What sort of knowledge have writers got? By expert standards they are entirely ignorant. But expertise itself produces ignorance. How scientific can the world picture of an expert be? The deeper his specialization, the more he is obliged to save the appearances. To express his faith in scientific method he supplies what is lacking from a stock of collective fictions about Nature or the history of Nature. As for the rest of us, the so-called educated public, the appropriate collective representations have been pointed out to us, and we have stocked our heads with pictures from introductory physics, astronomy, and biology courses. We do not, of course, see what is, but rather what we have been directed or trained to see. No individual penetration of the phenomena can occur in this way. Two centuries ago the romantic poets assumed that their minds were free, that they could know the good, that they could independently interpret and judge the entire creation, but those who still believe that the imagination has such powers to penetrate and to know keep their belief to themselves. As we now understand knowledge, does imagination *know* anything? At the moment the educated world does not think so.

Well, yes. By and large, we must agree. But there are wonderful exceptions. Theodore Roszak is a contemporary writer who set out to restore respect for the romantic poets (in *Where the Wasteland Ends*) and help people to awaken their powers of imagination. And there are other rebels against the present-day indoctrination in the "stock of collective fictions about Nature or the History of Nature." Especially are these rebels among essayists, and especially in education. John Holt is now publishing a paper, *Growth Without Schooling*, filled with material on parental self-reliance. ($10 for six issues—Holt Associates, Inc., 308 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116.) The reason for this paper? Mr. Holt says:

> In the last year or so, a number of people have talked or written to me about their children. They tell a familiar story. The child, who had always been alert, curious, bright, eager, was now fearful, bored, withdrawn, etc. All these people had tried to get the schools to make changes, without results. Many of them had tried to find alternative schools: either they could find none, or could not afford them, or felt they were not really different from or better than the public schools. All of them said to me, early in our talk or correspondence, "I just don't know what to do, I feel so helpless." I say, "Take them out of school altogether." They say, "The law won't let me." I say, "There are ways." They say, "I don't know how to teach my own children." I say, "Yes, you do, or at least, you know as much as anyone else." Sometimes they do take their children out of school, sometimes not.

FRONTIERS

One Frontier or Many?

SOME weeks ago a MANAS writer quoted from Richard Goodwin the statement that when values are regarded casually—as, that is, no more than matters of personal opinion—then human relations are filled with "enervating confusions," commitment crumples, and people generally are confronted by "the enslaving and impossible task of legislating an entire ethic." Remarks by Jacques Cousteau, made last June in accepting the International Pahlavi Environment Prize for 1977, help to make clear *why* "legislating an entire ethic" seems both necessary and impossible. He said:

> People of faith and good will have only to open their eyes to scan the expanse of the land, to explore the depths of the oceans—to see that the human environment is deteriorating and that nature is being stripped of her bounty.
>
> They have but to breathe to sense the growing pestilence of the cities' smog-laden air. They have but to open their ears to be deafened by a cacophony of motors and horns to be assailed by a confusion of advertisements and political propaganda. The water they drink tastes of chlorine; the food they eat, straight from the assembly line, is tasteless. Should they swim in the ocean—in lifeless, filthy waters—they risk serious infection. Families no longer assume that they are safe or secure. Young people are easy marks for drug traffickers, whose wares damage the very genetic heritage of humankind. And finally, the terror that the atom wields, whether used for military or civil purposes, is at last stirring up the legitimate rebellion of the citizens of this earth.
>
> Between nations, as between individuals, shocking inequities and injustices are worsened by rivalry. The rift is further deepened by greed, which has been elevated to the rank of Fundamental Social Principle. There is nothing surprising in the fact that millions of people suffer from hunger and nourish a hatred for those who will come to their rescue only at the last minute of famine or epidemic; nor is it shocking to discover that, in today's world, the more the word liberty is brandished, the more meaningless it becomes.

But Mr. Cousteau is not discouraged. He sees hope in the emergence of a new army of "Defenders of Life," slowly assembling before the walls dividing nations, intent upon concerns that unite instead of separating, looking with friendship across borders they are determined to cross, and meanwhile gathering a new and vital sort of knowledge, forming groups, "discussing issues and envisioning solutions." These people, one might say, are not wondering how to "legislate an entire ethic" but are acting on ideas and principles they have found in their hearts and tested with their minds. Some laws, if needed, will doubtless be passed, but they will prove *appropriate* laws only after substantial fulfillment of what Cousteau speaks of as "the process of making profound transformations in the conscience of human kind."

The question is not so much whether Jacques Cousteau is "too optimistic," as whether there is any other way to think.

Another frontier is described by a writer in *Appropriate Technology* for last August, Anthony Hopkinson, who says:

> If British schools are short of paper, why shouldn't they make their own from the abundance of waste paper? If the people of the *barrios* of Caracas are short of work, why shouldn't they set up a small industry to recycle the city's waste?
>
> My own interest in paper recycling began when I learned that in Britain we use enough trees for paper each year to make a forest the size of Wales. Eighty-five per cent of this paper is imported and most of it becomes waste paper very rapidly.

This interest resulted in the design by Mr. Hopkinson of a small-scale papermaking unit that works. Why couldn't some of the intermediate technology groups around the country—or the world—get the plans for a similar unit from Mr. Hopkinson, or one of his machines (he is manufacturing them), and put out their newsletters on the paper they make? This would be a joint project to show what can be done by a little ingenuity. "A craft, however, is really all it is," the inventor says, "it cannot do much to cut down imports and save trees, or to provide paper in quantity for our schools." True enough, but such crafts may have a telling effect on the way

people think—not only those who make the paper, but on all those who use and see it. One of his machines will soon be tested in a British school.

In Michigan there are now enough organic farmers to form an association called "Organic Growers of Michigan Cooperative, Inc.," with six regional chapters in the Lower Peninsula, averaging about 50 farmers to a chapter. Many of them are carrying on education in organic farming, mostly on an individual, unorganized basis, teaching "apprentices." For the full story on this progressive change in thinking, see *Acorn* for last September (Governors State University, Park Forest South, Ill. 60446). And on organic farming education around the world, see IFOAM (October, 1977) issued in the U.S. by Rodale Press, Box 900, Emmaus, Pa. 18049.

Early in the last century, progressive Americans were saying: Let's go West, get some good land and enjoy our freedom. Then, around 1900 the dominant "moral" idea was that we knew how to civilize the whole world. "Manifest Destiny," we called it. A lot of people who used this expression meant well, but they also expected to make it pay. In spite of the world wars—or perhaps because of them—we have had almost a riot of moral ideas during the twentieth century, nearly all of them declaring for freedom from things that are bad, interfering, and confining to human life. How to manage and distribute the fruits of progress was for a long time the endlessly argued question. Today the issues are rapidly changing. The old issues are still live, but increasingly eclipsed. Rich and poor, haves and have-nots, powerful and powerless, don't know how to live, and the planet seems to be rejecting us all by means described by Jacques Cousteau. Who would be so foolish as to try to legislate an entire ethic for people who don't even know how to live?

Working for a transformation of conscience may have one natural beginning through crafts—obvious contributions to learning how to live.