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WHAT COMES NEXT?

THE age of religion and the age of science—however much their claims and rationalizations were in conflict—had one great consequence in common: both led to the politics of power. The modern world is now in the throes of a great debacle the *failure* of power. The one thing on which our world has pinned its faith no longer functions well. In very nearly all directions, increasing applications of power are proving counter-productive.

During the nineteenth century, two great critics of reliance on power made their influence felt. In the section, "Pro and Contra" in *The Brothers Karamazov,* Dostoevsky declared—many readers believe he demonstrated—the *moral* impotence of power in the hands of religious authority. A corresponding declaration was provided by Tolstoy, another Russian, concerning the political uses of power. And in our own time still another Russian, Solzhenitsyn, has exposed the moral nightmare of an ideology which claimed to unite scientific knowledge with high social purpose. *The Gulag Archipelago* gives chapter and verse on the moral bankruptcy of political power in the name of scientific socialism. Today, we are beginning to recognize, the failure of power is not only moral but practical as well. Books by Barry Commoner, Amory Lovins, Erik Eckholm, Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins, and Wendell Berry have made this conclusion inescapable.

The criticism by the great nineteenth-century writers was essentially philosophical. It persuaded a minority of intelligent readers, but by no means enough to change the course of common human decision. It remained for the unfolding history of the twentieth century to supply further evidence at the practical level, precipitating the independent action of the present. Mohandas Gandhi may eventually be revealed as the authentic prophet of the twentieth century. He united Western moral perception (as expressed by Thoreau, Tolstoy, and Ruskin) with the deep transcendental conviction of Eastern philosophical religion and he warned against the devastations that would result from the application of power, pointing to the erosions of character it produces in humans, and the social degradations imposed by military and industrial processes. The strictures he pronounced against the uses of power (as long ago as 1908, in *Hind Swaraj*) are now seen to apply to current history the world around.

The best thinking of the time is now changing radically in direction. The Baconian proposition, Knowledge is Power, is no longer relied upon as the basis of civilization. The great issue, today, is what other credo to put in its place.

Let us look, first, at the philosophic criticism made by Tolstoy and one or two others. The fundamental charge is that scientific knowledge, when directed toward the realization of Bacon's goal, leaves the human being out of account. He has no place or part in the scientific universe. Tolstoy wrote in his essay, *On Life:*

> We say, for instance, that there is life in a cell and that it is a living being. Yet the fundamental idea of human life and the idea of the life found in the cell are not merely quite different but incompatible. The one conception excludes the other. . . . I am conscious of myself as a living being only because I feel myself, with all the cells of which I am composed, to be a single individual living being. I am entirely composed of living cells, they tell me. To what then do I ascribe the property of life: to the cells or myself? If I admit that the cells have life, I must eliminate from the concepts of life the chief indication of my own life—the consciousness that I am a separate undivided living being.

A century later the same criticism was made by Ronald Laing in *The Facts of Life:*

> This one cell is the cell all my cells are derived from, by a process of dividing into two, each of these two dividing into a further two, and so on, and on.
>
> However, it's a moot point whether this precise knowledge of our microscopic origin and growth into the macroscopic domain changes or settles any of the basic philosophical problems attendant on the question "Who am I?"

Somewhat earlier, Albert Camus had written:

> . . . all the knowledge on earth will give me nothing to assure me that the world is mine. You describe it to me and you teach me to classify it. You enumerate its laws and in my thirst for knowledge I admit that they are true. You take apart its mechanism and my hope increases. At the final stage you teach me that this wondrous and multi-colored universe can be reduced to the atom and that the atom itself can be reduced to the electron. All this is good and I wait for you to continue. But you tell me of an invisible planetary system in which electrons gravitate around a nucleus. You explain this world with an image. I realize then that you have been reduced to poetry. I shall never know.

Science, these writers are saying, is a way of obtaining certainty about everything except ourselves, and if we submit to this exclusive focus we shut ourselves out from ourselves. There are of course other ways of thinking about and using science Polanyi and Maslow have illustrated them—but here we are speaking of the familiar patterns of conventional thought which have shaped the social, economic, and political forms of our society and its idea of knowledge.

A contemporary expression of essentially the same criticism is provided by Walker Percy in the Fall 1977 *Michigan Quarterly Review:*

> The scientist is only interested in a molecule of sodium chloride or a supernova or an amoeba or even a patient sharing the same disorder. But the peculiar fate of the human being is that he is stuck with the consciousness of himself as a self, as a unique individual, or at least with the possibility of becoming such a self. The paradox of the triumph of science and technology is that to the degree that a person perceives himself as an example of, a specimen of, this or that type of social creature or biological genotype, to precisely this same degree does he become short of being himself. The great gap in human knowledge to which science cannot address itself by the very nature of the scientific method is, to paraphrase Kierkegaard, nothing less than this: what is it like to be an individual, to be born, live and die in the twentieth century? If we assume, consciously or unconsciously, that science can answer such questions, we will never even be able to ask the questions, let alone answer them. Who then can address himself to the question? The individual person of course, who while accepting the truth and beauty of science, retains his sovereignty over himself. . . . We are all aware, I think, of the dangers of the passive consumership of technology, confronted as we are by the dazzling credentials of science. A certain loss of personal sovereignty occurs when a person comes to believe that his happiness depends upon his exposure to this or that psychology or this or that group encounter or technique.

We know enough, now, about other cultures—the simple ones called "primitive" in other parts of the world, or even nearer home—to realize that loss of individual sovereignty is not a matter of wealth or even of a political system, but basically of the way we think about ourselves and how as a result we live. The great material and even social benefits of the affluent society become instruments which wear away at individual sovereignty. Visit any large county hospital—there are hundreds of them around the country—and observe what the mass practice of modern medicine does to individual sovereignty. We are not here speaking deprecatingly of doctors and nurses, but of the faces of people you see in the corridors and lying in the beds.

The *structure* of the hospital service is the enemy of individual sovereignty. Often the doctors and nurses instinctively contest its pressures. They pause, smile, try to comfort and reassure. For the patient this is a kind of miracle—something he has learned never to expect. Yet it happens. His being is recognized and somehow respected. He feels a forlorn hope, but nonetheless hope. Power indeed shapes the system, and science dictates its necessities, but people continue, however inadequately, to recognize individual reality. One way or another, they resist the system on small individual fronts

still unmonitored by the supervisors of assembly line practice. These things happen and should not be forgotten when the system is called to account. In them lies the chief hope of changing the system.

But meanwhile, the massive influence of the uses of power and the interpretation of knowledge in the language of power closes off the channels of normal human action for human ends. Consider for example the way in which the funds raised by taxes are allocated for use by the government of the United States. In *Harper's* for January, S. I. Hayakawa, now a senator, tells about the work of the Budget Committee, of which he is a member:

> You don't have any complicated decisions to make, because you are not dealing with specific appropriations for such things as food stamps or the costs of the National Labor Relations Board or all the other things the government does. What you are dealing with are overall totals.
>
> The numbers you work with on this committee turned out to be very simple. You are always dealing in hundreds of millions—or billions. Therefore, when we say 1.0, that means $1 billion. Then we have .1; that means $100 million—and that's the smallest figure we ever deal with in the Budget Committee.
>
> A member of the committee will say, for instance, "Here's an appropriation for such-and-such. It was 1.7 for 1977. So for the 1978 budget we ought to make it 2.9." So all we do is add 1.2; that's not hard. The next item is 2.5. The members discuss it back and forth, and someone says, "Let's raise it to 3.7." They look around at each other. "Everybody in favor?" "Yes sir. Okay." So in five minutes we have disposed of 2 billion bucks—2 billion, not 2 million. I never realized it could be so easy. It's all simple addition. You *don't even have to know subtraction.*

Mr. Hayakawa has his own purposes here, of course. He is leading up to the point that *he* will undertake to teach the committee how to subtract. But that isn't our point, which is that *nobody* can spend money wisely or effectively in amounts like that. The decisions are unreal. Nobody's common sense has a chance at this level. No intelligent man should submit to such a process or lend it dignity. And how could a voter have an opinion about such matters except to conclude that they are incomprehensible. We are all—most of all the Senators—powerless people who do what we do because the momentum of the system demands it. Actually *thinking* about such things has been made impossible by the dimensions of national finance.

We are now ready for a long quotation from E. F. Schumacher, probably one of the last things he wrote, since it appeared in *Psychology Today* for September, 1977, the month of his death. Schumacher was the man who, more than anyone else in our time, showed the inability of power to give intelligent direction to itself. Power, at the levels of exercise reached in the twentieth century, can have no relations with intelligence. It is out of scale with human life. In this one-page article in *Psychology Today* Schumacher said:

> The art of life is to focus on difficulties and deal with them as best one can, without making psychological problems out of them that then lead to nightmares. We could also say that the art is to maintain a sense of proportion in our lives.
>
> But we can keep a sense of proportion only when dealing with sensible proportions. If things become so vast that the mind cannot any more "encompass" them, a sense of proportion becomes an impossibility. When we are told that there are, say, 8 million unemployed in the United States, the size of the problem paralyzes our imagination and all we can have is nightmares. It would be different if we were told that there are, for example, 90 unemployed in our neighborhood. We could then focus on the problem, find out who they are, what they could do, what they would want to do. Local action would then become at least conceivable: it is not even conceivable as long as our minds are fixed on large *national totals.*

Why, one wonders, have we waited so long to recognize this plain common sense? Why didn't we think of it ourselves? Have we been hypnotized by the fascinations of bigness? Have we been deluded by the spectacle of power that is too all-encompassing for anyone to get a handle on?

What to do about all this is by no means evident, but one thing that seems at least possible is to stop dignifying attempts to manipulate power

at this incomprehensible level, on the ground that pretense of control is bound to be a monstrous fraud. Meanwhile, we can turn our energies to other, more reasonable tasks. How else can we shrink the dimensions of human problems to a size where intelligence is able to work out and apply solutions?

Mr. Schumacher proposed this remedy:

> Maybe what we most need is a holiday from global national, in fact from all superhumanly big statistics. We would then cease worrying about "growth" or "zero-growth" or even "decline" in the incomprehensibly large total called GNP, the Gross National Product. Worrying is a vice and an indulgence; it robs us of energy and has never yet done anybody any good. I and my community may be in decline while national or global totals show healthy growth. The latter is no consolation; it cannot make me satisfied with my own condition. Conversely, if *I* can keep my own and my community's house in good order, I am doing all I can do, and worrying about national or even global performances that I cannot influence because they are completely outside my reach does not do anybody any good.

Somebody, of course, needs to keep track of national or global totals. There are decisions to be made in behalf of the general welfare. In ancient times the Inca or the Pharaoh took care of such things, putting aside some food for years of drought or poor harvest. This foresight is a simple matter within the understanding of all, but who, nowadays, can grasp the policies of the Department of Agriculture by means of rational understanding? (See *The Unsettling of America* by Wendell Berry.)

Usually regional needs can be left to the local people. In *Food First* Lappé and Collins describe the foresight and common sense of the peasant farmers of the Sahel—the region overtaken by decimating famine in the early 1970s. These small farmers, the writers say, "developed a profound understanding of their environment." Their country is arid and they made the best use of the land, cultivating a wide variety of crops.

> Sahelian Mali was once known as the breadbasket of Africa. It could always be counted upon to trade grain in times of neighbors' needs. The Sahelian precolonial custom was to construct small farming and village granaries for storing millet for flour and in some cases for even more years of consumption, knowing full well that small-harvest years should be expected. One United Nations study arguing against the idea that the Sahel is overpopulated noted that, if the traditional storage practices were followed, the "carrying capacity" of the land in people and animals would be that of the average years and not that of the poorest years.

What happened to this system that worked so well for centuries? Agribusiness happened to it. The land was taken over by farmers who no longer raised food for Sahelians to eat, but cash crops for the lucrative European and American markets. Result: No storage of food for the lean years. Economic power ruined the country, and then economic experts declared it "over-populated"!

Back to Mr. Schumacher:

> People ask the strangest questions. For instance: How will the people of the United States, with their history of limitless expansion and boundless expectations, adjust to the coming of scarcity?
>
> Such questions are quite unanswerable, because the concepts are much too big. "The people of the United States"—whom are we talking about? Rockefeller or sharecroppers, labor union chiefs or bank clerks, people in high-rise apartments or people in suburbia, in rural areas or in city slums? Their histories are as different as their expectations, and so are the difficulties they will have to meet. Above all, the spirit of self-reliance differs from person to person. Traveling across the United States quite recently, I met many people with a splendid spirit of self-reliance. Many of them had a better time than they ever had in their lives because they were discovering a *new freedom*—the less you need, the freer you become. The idea of possible scarcity did not give them nightmares; on the contrary, it stimulated and exhilarated them. "Let's discover whether we really *need* all that."

What were these self-reliant people doing? Something very simple: they were—and are—acting on things within their capacity, and making their influence felt. They have stopped

contemplating in powerless bewilderment figures that no one can really understand or do anything about. As Schumacher says:

> When things are looked at on the proper human scale, they become manageable; all problems become quite soluble by quite straightforward, ordinary methods.

This progressive transition from the doctrine of bigness and power to problems set on the human scale has been quite recent. An article by Martin Green in the Winter 1977/78 *American Scholar* shows that the leading British scientists in the first half of this century—such men as J. B. S. Haldane, J. D. Bernal, and P. M. S. Blackett—secure in their conviction that scientific knowledge provided the power necessary to do good, were naturally attracted by the Marxist claim that scientific socialism would bring the benefits of science to the masses. "What energized this group of scientists was the example offered by Communist Russia, an example of monumental planning, of industrialization from scratch, of scientism in education, of nationalized efficiency, of technocracy." These men had the best of intentions. They were inspired by H. G. Wells's idea that the world needed a "big, unifying and concentrating force." When Watson and Crick gave their interpretation of DNA structure in 1953, Bernal declared that life itself might now be accounted for "in terms that fit in with our intellectual and manipulative control of the non-living part of the environment."

Happily, that kind of thinking, so far as political doctrine is concerned, now seems completely finished. Even the radical thinkers of the present are rejecting the idea of achieving total power. Intending to do good, the "total revolutionists" achieve only evil. As a French ex-Communist, André Gluckmann, declared in a recent book, ideology itself is inherently evil. He and others cite Solzhenitsyn's work as proof. Another spokesman, Bernard-Henri Levy, has said: "The only successful revolution of this century is totalitarianism," and he called Solzhenitsyn "the Shakespeare of our time, the only one who knows how to point out the monsters." Still another French thinker, Jean-Marie Benoist, predicts that social activism will now become fluid—in the words of a *Time* (Sept. 19, 1977) summarizer—"a world of 'small cells' of people coalescing on issues that affect them, and not on the grand political ideologies."

Is it too much to say that the age of power-seeking is over, that the age of moral intelligence exercised on a human scale has begun?

REVIEW

THINKING ABOUT THINKING

STUDY—and study is required—of the three-part series on "Thinking" by the late Hannah Arendt, titled "Reflections," in the *New Yorker* for Nov. 21, 28, and Dec. 5 of last year, may give the reader several kinds of pause. First of all, the writer implicitly reveals her certainty that independent reasoning is able to reach reliable conclusions. In support of what she says, she offers her own thinking—and the independent thinking of some other philosophers—with no attempt to provide scientific or "objective" evidence. One may feel this to be a wonderful emancipation, since if human beings are able by strong and disciplined thought to find out what they need to know, the long epoch of our rule by Experts may be coming to a close. It will no longer be possible to brush aside the work of philosophical essayists by saying, "That's metaphysics," or "It's just philosophy," in preliminary ridicule of what is proposed.

Not many people have dared to write in this way in recent years. For centuries even, the works of the mind have not been able to stand alone and still receive serious attention. Galileo's contempt for pretentiously bad thinking has been uniformly applied to *all* independent thinking. The indisputable rule has been, "Don't think, find out." In consequence, large areas of inquiry have been barred from investigation because there is no known way of "scientifically" confirming individual reflection.

Hannah Arendt doesn't bother to argue about the legitimacy of independent thinking: she simply does it, relying, one may suppose, on the self-evidence of what she says as test of its validity. The question arises: How shall we know whether or not she is *right?* It seems upsetting indeed to contemplate the possibility that we may not be able to be sure about such matters. The scientific attitude has been that there is no point in considering questions which cannot (at least in principle) have unambiguous answers. But the reply to this claim which comes from those with philosophical inclinations seems of the greatest importance. They say: The questions which cannot be answered save by individuals in individual terms, each one for himself or herself, are precisely the questions which cannot be neglected without loss of humanity. There is now, they say, "objective evidence" of this, since the decline of humanity in modern times should be plain to all, and the period of the decline has also been the period of deliberate neglect of such questions.

Hannah Arendt shows that humans do two kinds of thinking. They think about the world and what is in it, but they also think about thinking and about the thinker. Thinking about the world is necessary for the reason that we live in the world and need to adapt to its conditions, using the materials it provides in order to stay alive. But thinking about thinking is equally necessary since only by this means have we any hope of *making sense* out of the enterprise of living in the world. This writer maintains that understanding life in the world requires stepping out of it, in some way or other. To understand the meaning of something is to have it as an object, and this involves getting away from it in order to gain perspective. This is the meaning, for Hannah Arendt, of independent thinking—philosophizing.

She calls the fruit of independent thinking *judgment*—the capacity to decide what is right or best to do in some particular, limited circumstance of life. Judgment, reflection shows us, grows out of a general view of the meaning of human life, one's own life. If you don't have a view of life, there will be time after time when you simply do not know what to do. The result may be a life almost entirely governed by impulse, with much resulting confusion.

This discussion of thinking by Hannah Arendt is a wonderful example of the use of the power of imagination. The imagination is commonly regarded as a faculty exercised most effectively by

artists. Artists make images which gain our delighted and appreciative response. We wonder at the artist's ability to generate for us a kind of reality we had not before experienced. The philosopher's use of the imagination is of another—surely a higher—order. We are helped to experience ("see") aspects of subjective reality that had not been known to us at all. There is for example the following discussion of Judgment:

> Judgment, finally, the mysterious endowment of the mind by which the general, always a mental construction, and the particular, always given to sense experience, are brought together, is a "peculiar faculty," and in no way inherent in the intellect, not even in the case of "determinant judgments," where particulars are subsumed under general rules in the form of a syllogism—because no rules are available for the *applications* of the rules. To know how to apply the general to the particular is an additional "natural gift," the want of which is "ordinarily called stupidity," according to Kant, who adds, "And for such a failing there is no remedy." The autonomous nature of judgment is even more obvious in the case of "reflective judgment," which does not descend from the general to the particular but ascends "from the particular . . . to the universal" by deciding, without any overall rules, This is beautiful, this is ugly, this is right this is wrong; and here, for a guiding principle, judging "can only give (it) as a law from and to itself" (Kant).
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> I call these mental activities basic because they are autonomous; each of them obeys the laws inherent in the activity itself, although all of them depend on a certain stillness of the soul's passions. . . .

What is the importance of autonomous thinking, of thinking about thinking?

> All thought arises from experience, but no experience yields any meaning, or even coherence, without undergoing the operations of imagining and thinking. Seen from the perspective of thinking, life in its sheer thereness is meaningless; seen from the perspective of the immediacy of life and the world given to the senses, thinking is, as Plato indicated, a living death. The philosopher, who lives in "the land of thought," will naturally be inclined to look upon these things from the viewpoint of the thinking ego, for which a life without meaning *is* a kind of living death. The thinking ego, because it is not identical with the real self, is unaware of its own withdrawal from the common world of appearances; from the perspective of the thinking ego, it is, rather, as though the invisible had come forward. The innumerable entities making up the world of appearances, which through their very presence distract the mind and prevent its activity, are found to have been positively concealing an always invisible Being that reveals itself only to the mind. In other words, what for the common sense is the obvious withdrawal of the mind from the world appears in the mind's own perspective as a "withdrawal of Being." . . . And, it is true, everyday life . . . is spent in a world from which all that is "visible" to the mind is totally absent.

The unpopularity of philosophy is easy to explain, if this is true. The ordinary person is very much involved with necessary worldly activities, usually declaring that abstract thinking will not help him in any practical way. As the writer says:

> These remarks may indicate why thinking, the quest for meaning—as opposed to the thirst for knowledge, even for knowledge for its own sake—has so often been felt to be unnatural, as though men, whenever they reflect without purpose, going beyond the natural curiosity awakened by the manifold wonders of the world's sheer thereness and their own existence, engage in an activity *contrary to the human condition.* Thinking as such, not only the raising of the unanswerable "ultimate questions" but every reflection that does not serve knowledge and is not guided by practical needs and aims is, as Heidegger once observed, "*out of order"* (italics added). It interrupts any doing, any ordinary activities, no matter what they happen to be. All thinking demands a *stop*-and-think.

Another difficulty with independent thinking is that, the conclusions you reach remain on the plane of thought—that is, you can't directly "change reality" by thinking. There is, as Hannah Arendt says, "no clearer or more radical opposition than between thinking and doing—the principles on which we act and the criteria by which we judge and conduct our lives depend ultimately on the life of the mind." While we are unable to put thought in the place of action—to do so would be what people call "magic"—yet the *meaning* of our action is disclosed only by thought. There is therefore an inevitable *intramural warfare,* as Hannah Arendt puts it, between the common sense of everyday life,

which guides our action, and independent thinking about the soul, from which our judgment comes, but which is debarred from any direct action.

In an earlier paper—printed in the *New Yorker* for Feb. 25, 1967—Hannah Arendt gave effective illustration of this difference—often extreme—between common sense and philosophy. Using Socrates as the type of the thinker and philosopher, she quoted from the *Gorgias* his declaration, "It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong," adding this comment:

> To the philosopher—or rather, to man insofar as he is a thinking being—this ethical proposition about doing and suffering wrong is no less compelling than mathematical truth. But to man insofar as he is a citizen, an acting being concerned with the world and the public welfare rather than with his own well-being—including, for instance, his "immortal soul" whose "health" should have precedence over the needs of a perishable body—the Socratic statement is not true at all.

But if we are led by experience to discover that we are more than "citizens" of some national state, and that the health of the soul is a need of all human beings, then the truth of the Socratic statement appears in a stronger light.

Some appreciative notice should be taken of the fact that the *New Yorker* puts material of this sort into print.

COMMENTARY
THE TROUBLE WITH EDUCATION

IN this week's "Children," a question is asked which is not altogether fair to present-day college students. They are there, it is implied, not from any earnest desire for knowledge, but because going to college is "the thing to do."

The fact is, however, that when they get to college they do try to find answers to basic questions. Discouragement ensues because the higher learning is not concerned with basic questions. This becomes plain from an article about teaching psychology by G. Edward Hughes in an earlier (Spring, 1977) issue of *New Directions in Teaching*. He says:

> As most college instructors, those of us who teach introductory psychology courses find ourselves continuously caught between two seemingly opposite forces. On the one hand there are our own predetermined course desires as set forth in the abominable course syllabus; on the other hand there are the desires of our students, desires that too often go unnoticed.
>
> At times I am certain that as teachers we feel compelled to thoroughly "educate" our students in the intricacies of all psychological phenomena. In essence, we strive to create an academic environment from which the next Freud or Skinner might emerge. . . . in this situation we have discovered what *we* want to teach our students.
>
> But when do we discover the desires of our students, those things that *they* want to obtain from our courses? When I ask my students why they enrolled in the class or what they want to learn about psychology, two themes emerge. First, they believe that the course will help them better understand themselves. They want to know such things as how and why they act the way they do. Second, these students want to be better able to cope with life in an ever-changing world. . . .
>
> While it is apparent that no single introductory course in psychology (or one in any other discipline) could fill such an order, it should create within the student an interest in and an appreciation for the subject so that in the future, the student might intelligently pursue a deeper investigation of the subject via self-study.

It should, but, as Mr. Hughes says, it doesn't. It seems likely that *all* the basic troubles of modern education lie right here.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ON GOING TO COLLEGE

AN article on community colleges in the Winter 1977 *New Directions in Teaching* starts out with questions. The writer, H. Alan Johnston, asks:

> Why do community colleges insist upon maintaining the same traditional academic regulations as senior institutions? Why has the two-year institution made so little effort to implement a more specialized program to suit the specialized needs of their students?

The reason for these questions is developed in a discussion of the practices of community colleges:

> Stringent admission requirements at senior institutions have made them inaccessible to scores of prospective college freshmen. These less scholarly students, termed "high risk" by the author, are students who have successfully graduated from high school, but are subsequently denied admission to universities on the basis of deficient academic credentials. . . .
>
> Apparently the high risk student is adversely affected by traditional grading policies, where failure is irrevocably imposed upon those who achieve the least, where self-esteem is systematically destroyed by detractory comparisons. These are students who have floundered academically under years of traditional practices. The continuance of these policies in community college programs, programs supposedly designed in their behalf, exemplifies stereotyped, inflexible treatment which is unintelligent at best. For these students, stripped of their confidence in a competitive high school setting, more of the same is not the answer.
>
> If the community colleges and their transfer programs are truly dedicated to equalizing access to higher education, as open admission policies would lead us to believe, then they are duty bound to practice academic regulations which are more compatible with the needs of their students. It is time for the community college to stop playing university.

This writer has one basic proposal and one clear justification for it. First, he says, the community college experience can be made more inviting by changing the style of grading. In the university, grades are competitive and punitive toward those unable to compete. Community colleges should not, Mr. Johnston says, threaten their students with grades suggesting failure, but provide incentives to help them reach an acceptable plateau of achievement. He cites the research of B. S. Bloom as showing that students slow in responding to teaching are not *unable* to reach a level of mastery; they just need more time to get there.

What are the obstacles to making the proposed change? Mr. Johnston finds two. First, the community college administrators probably went to an institution of higher learning and are drawn to repeat its methods, "without stopping to reflect upon the vast gulf between their own needs in the prestigious graduate programs in which they, themselves, were students, and the needs of high risk community college students." The other obstacle is the common assumption that the job of the community college is "to screen students as 'college material,' similar to separating wheat from chaff."

Mr. Johnston's recommendations seem plain common sense, but what, actually, is he trying to do?

Forgetting for the moment the contrast between graduate student programs and the community college curriculum, he is trying to reduce the effects of the institutionalization of education. If a boy or girl comes to a community college to learn, the task of the teacher is to help him learn, giving whatever encouragement is possible. The idea is to provide the student full opportunity to find out how much and how well he can do.

But one can't help noticing that a certain artificiality attends the entire enterprise of college education, whether in a community college or a four-year school. In the first place, how many young people go to these places because they are hungry for knowledge, because they really want to *know?*

In his much attacked *Harvard Educational Review* article (Winter, 1969), Arthur Jensen said one absolutely indisputable thing: "Whether we like it or not, the educational system is one of society's most powerful mechanisms for sorting out children to assume different positions in the occupational hierarchy." It follows from this that a great many young people go to college in order to get better jobs.

What does not follow is that going to college will improve their actual qualifications for better jobs. In *The Great Training Robbery* Ivar Berg pointed out that personnel managers in industry hire college graduates because they are supposed to have poise and self-assurance. The degree, he said, is regarded as "a badge of the holder's stability." The people who do the hiring for industry simply take this for granted, making it evident that in their view "the content of a college program mattered a good deal less than the fact of a successful completion of studies."

Colleges and universities, in short, are regarded by the "real" world as places which give out badges.

Mr. Johnston finds it deplorable that conventional grading policies may have the effect of systematically destroying the self-esteem of students. This is undoubtedly bad and should not occur, but the real question may rather be: should *any* institution be allowed to acquire this sort of power?

It may be that trade schools, whose business it is to train people for jobs, do not suffer from the confusions and misapplications of authority which seem to be so characteristic of places of learning. One goes to a trade or professional school because one knows what one wants. Robert Hutchins refused to call this education, and he was undoubtedly right. Training is what is provided in trade schools, and if you want to practice a trade you may be able to get the elementary skills in a trade school and learn the rest on the job.

Colleges, on the other hand, are finishing schools for middle-class youngsters who are doing what their parents want them to do. They are getting something intangible called "an education." In the universities this has two meanings. In practical terms it means for a great many of the students acquiring the contacts and "polish" that will assure a better career after graduation, while for a minority it means climbing the academic ladder in some scholarly or scientific specialty. (See *The Dissenting Academy* edited by Theodore Roszak.)

The young, of course, do not think of college in this harshly critical way. Motivation is blurred, as it is in most of us throughout adult life. The community college, it seems from Mr. Johnston's account, is a kind of catch-all for all these hopes, ambiguities, and undefined purposes, and is meant to give generous hospitality to the young who are not promising candidates for the academic race. He puts it this way:

> Two-year institutions command the most diversified post in American education today. Commitments have been extended in so many directions that their tacit obligation to high risk students, as expressed in open admissions, has been seemingly forgotten. Their service to the local community including adults of all ages necessitates a boundless curriculum. Amidst all of this activity, their noblest and most fundamental purpose is being neglected: that of extending democracy by equalizing access to higher education.

Well, it seems probable that the teachers, who are by inclination and calling considerate individuals, may be expected to do what they can. One hears of community colleges where wonderful things happen, now and then. But it seems a rather large mistake to assume that colleges or schools of any sort will be able to abolish or clarify the confusions and mislabeled intentions of the population at large.

That is why the work of Ivan Illich is so salutary. If you want to learn, he says, find somebody who knows what you want to learn and make a deal with him. Don't confuse knowing with institutional authority. Moreover, there is a radical difference between growing to maturity (the only rational purpose of education) and becoming acceptable for employment at some enviable level. If we could straighten out our thinking about these matters, we would probably need far fewer colleges, and the ones that remained would be better examples of what is supposed to happen in them.

FRONTIERS
HUMANISTIC SCIENCE

IN his posthumously published *Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (Viking, 1971), Abraham Maslow observed:

> I would say no Utopia can be constructed henceforth by the knowledgeable person without making peace with the concept of synergy. It looks to me at this time as if any Utopia, or Eupsychia (which I think is a better name), must have as one of its foundations a set of high synergy institutions.

What is "synergy"? As Maslow's paper in *Farther Reaches* explains, the term was invented by Ruth Benedict (1887-1948) to provide the basis for a conception of society based on humanistic values. Her *Patterns of Culture* had left some of its readers with the impression that no "value judgments" should be made in cultural anthropology, and she found this objectionable. Accordingly, she set out to describe the pattern of a *good* society, as revealed in observable primitive cultures around the world. The fruit of her research was incorporated in a lecture given at Bryn Mawr College in 1941, and Maslow, who was working with her at that time, made extracts from her manuscript of the lecture, which was nowhere published and could not be found after her death.

According to Maslow in *Farther Reaches,* Ruth Benedict began by comparing "secure" and "insecure" societies, but for her lecture adopted the categories of "high synergy" and "low synergy" as being less open to the suspicion that they projected merely her own ideals and tastes. She said in her lecture:

> From all comparative material, the conclusion that emerges is that *societies where non-aggression is conspicuous have social orders in which the individual by the same act and at the same time serves his own advantage and that of the group. . . .* Non-aggression occurs (in these societies) not because people are unselfish and put social obligations above personal desires, but when social arrangements make these two identical. Considered just logically, production—whether raising yams or catching fish—is a general benefit and if no man-made institution distorts the fact that every harvest, every catch adds to the village food supply, a man can be a good gardener and also be a social benefactor. He is advantaged and his fellows are advantaged. . . .
>
> I shall speak of cultures with low synergy where the social structure provides for acts which are mutually opposed and counteractive, and cultures with high synergy where it provides for acts which are mutually reinforcing. . . . I *spoke of societies with high social synergy where their institutions insure mutual advantage from their undertakings, and societies with low social synergy where the advantage of one individual becomes a victory over another, and the majority who are not victorious must shift as they can.* (Mallow's italics.)

This means, essentially, that cooperative and mutually supportive behavior does not have to be "heroic," or a "more expensive" way of behaving because it is considerate of others, but may be recognized as the best system of human relationships from every point of view. There are no losers.

For example, Amory Lovins in *Soft Energy Paths* is pointing to the high social synergy which will result from adoption of solar, wind, and biogas sources of energy instead of nuclear plants. A "heroic decision," he remarks, "does not seem necessary in this case, because the energy system that seems socially more attractive is also cheaper and easier."

It should be noted, however, that when great changes are called for, a large number of "heroic decisions" have to be made by the pioneers in order to demonstrate to others the absolute value of high synergy arrangements.

A good test for Ruth Benedict's theory of high and low synergy would be to read Lappé and Collins' *Food First* with this comparison in mind. *Food First* will be recognized as a documentary study of the low social synergy effects of large-scale commercial exploitation of the land by agribusiness. The same test could be applied to the towns described in Walter R. Goldsmidt's As You Sow (1947), a study of the effects on the social community of industrialized agriculture.

Small, owner-operated farms have an opposite—high synergy—effect.

In short, Ruth Benedict's conception of a society based on humanistic principles provides a natural matrix of values for the mature thinking of environmentalists, ecologists, and advocates and practitioners of organic agriculture. That Maslow recognized such potentialities in Benedict's ideas is obvious from his declaration that any conception of Utopia would henceforth have to include high synergy institutions as part of its foundation.

While his paper in *Farther Reaches* gives a good account of Benedict's work, along with reports on his own researches in collaboration with her, a more complete version of her 1941 Bryn Mawr lecture is available in the April 1970 issue of the *American Anthropologist* (Vol. 72, No. 22). It seems that back in 1941, John J. Honigmann, a graduate student who studied with Ruth Benedict, and worked with Maslow at Brooklyn College, borrowed Benedict's synergy lecture while Maslow had it, and copied long sections. It is this material, edited by Maslow and Honigmann, which was published in the *American Anthropologist* (with an introduction by Margaret Mead, executrix of Ruth Benedict's work). An abridgment of this version also appears in *Psychology Today* for June, 1970, accompanied by George Harris's account of a talk with Dr. Maslow, shortly before his death. "The beauty of synergy," Harris relates, "haunted Maslow for years, and he told everybody who would listen of Benedict's insight." Here was an opportunity to show that decency and goodness in human relations have the clear support of anthropological research:

> It offered [Mr. Harris says] a chance to build a humanistic study of comparative culture, to escape narrow scientism. "It was a holistic rather than an atomistic effort to describe societies as unitary organisms or wholes. . . ." He expanded his interpretation further in *Euplychian Management,* his book on the prospects for building utopian institutions.

It seems a matter of some import that Ruth Benedict's cultural research, Abraham Maslow's conceptions of Eupsychia, Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful,* the proposals of *Blueprint for Survival,* Amory Lovins' *Soft Energy Paths,* and the work of the New Alchemists at Woods Hole, Mass., all fit together so naturally and well.