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HEROISM OR COMMON SENSE?

EARLY in *Soft Energy Paths* Amory Lovins remarks that choosing energy sources alternative to fossil fuels and nuclear installations cannot be regarded as a "heroic decision." The social advantages—good for all the people—in developing and using solar, wind, and biogas sources will cost less than continuing reliance on present methods of generating power, for the reason that fossil fuel will surely go on increasing in price and nuclear installations are not only dangerous and inefficient, but every year become more outrageously expensive.

Shall we say that, under the changed circumstances of the present, morality and everyday common sense are at last joining hands? And is the problem, then, simply one of education—setting the facts before the public—instead of having to persuade people to do what they *ought to* do?

The outward circumstances of our lives have certainly changed, enabling writers like Amory Lovins and others to point out the unmistakably bad effects on people of centralization of power and the harm to the environment of the numerous excesses of industrialism. But the moral issues, others would urge, haven't changed at all. They are the same as they were in the time of Socrates and Plato, and the task of public-spirited individuals is also the same: the teaching of virtue to mankind. What has happened in our day is that people are being subjected to environmental and economic pressures which make the path of virtue seem more acceptable, or even desirable.

The idea that the good things of life—all the practical things, that is—come naturally with the practice of virtue is of course not new. This was the teaching of Jesus and of other great moral reformers, but the common tendency has been to go after the things we believe are good, and then to make a definition of virtue consistent with getting them. Darwin and Spencer have been handy sources for doing this, since their doctrines of the survival of the fittest and the struggle for existence suggest that, if Nature is the authority, then those who survive and win in the struggle are the most virtuous members of the species. Winning more than you need may be even better, since money in the bank gives security against bad times to come. So, in economic theory, the acquisitive man has natural virtue and his wealth is the badge of sanctity.

These claims, so acceptable a generation or so ago, are now regarded with suspicion. A great swing of the pendulum has taken place. Eminent biologists are talking about cooperation and altruism in the natural order. Historians and ecologists are saying that exploitive conquest leads to self-defeat and ruin. Psychologists speak of health as transcendence and hold up Bodhisattvic self-sacrifice as an ideal of human behavior.

So it isn't only the high price of petroleum and the anxieties produced by nuclear piles which are turning modern man toward the path of virtue. There are other influences, difficult to catalog yet all-pervasive, making themselves felt. Our discontents have overshadowed the blessings of civilization and the slogans of the first half of the twentieth century—"progress" and "growth"—are becoming the epithets of the second half.

Just seventy years ago M. K. Gandhi, on a ship carrying him back to South Africa to resume his nonviolent campaign for justice to Indians, set down ideas about Western civilization that anticipated very nearly every criticism that is voiced today. The small book published the following year (1909), titled *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Home Rule), amounted to an all-out attack on the

most admired achievements of Western civilization. He singled out machines and machinery of practically every sort as his major target. Gandhi contended that India had been conquered, not by British arms, but by the submission of the Indian people to the cultural imperialism of British (Western) civilization. A passage embodying Gandhi's disapproval of railways will illustrate his outlook and show why the book had little influence except among a few followers during those early years. The text is in dialogue form, with questions by "Reader" and answers by the "Editor." Charged by "Reader" with attacking institutions "considered to be good," Gandhi replied:

> The true inwardness of the evils of civilization you will understand with difficulty. Doctors assure us that a consumptive clings to life even when he is about to die. Consumption does not produce apparent hurt—it even produces a seductive color about a patient's face, so as to induce the belief that all is well. Civilization is such a disease, and we have to be very wary. . . .
>
> It must be manifest to you that, but for the railways, the English could not have such a hold on India as they have. The railways, too, have spread the bubonic plague. Without them, masses could not move from place to place. They are the carriers of plague germs. Formerly we had natural segregation. Railways have also increased the frequency of famines, because, owing to facility of means of locomotion, people sell out their grain, and it is sent to the dearest markets. People become careless, and so the pressure of famine increases. They accentuate the evil nature of man. Bad men fulfill their evil designs with greater rapidity. The holy places of India have become unholy. Formerly people went to these places with very great difficulty. Generally, therefore, only the real devotees visited such places. Nowadays rogues visit them in order to practice their roguery.

Reader objects that good men can ride the trains, too. Why don't they?

> Good travels at a snail's pace—it can, therefore, have little to do with the railways. Those who want to do good are not selfish, they are not in a hurry, they know that to impregnate people with good requires a long time. But evil has wings. To build a house takes time. Its destruction takes none. So the railways can become a disturbing agency for the evil one only. . . . It was after the advent of railways that we began to believe in distinctions, and you are at liberty now to say that it is through the railways that we are beginning to abolish those distinctions. An opium-eater may argue the advantage of opium-eating from the fact that he began to understand the evil of the opium habit after having eaten it. I would ask you to consider well what I have said on the railways.

The ills of civilization are closely related to machinery:

> Formerly, men worked in the open air only so much as they liked. Now thousands of workmen meet together and for the sake of maintenance work in factories or mines. Their condition is worse than that of beasts. They are obliged to work, at the risk of their lives, at most dangerous occupations, for the sake of millionaires. Formerly, men were made slaves under physical compulsion, now they are enslaved by temptation of money and of the luxuries money can buy. . . .
>
> If the machinery craze grows in our country, it will become an unhappy land. It may be considered a heresy, but I am bound to say that it were better for us to send money to Manchester and to use flimsy Manchester cloth than to multiply mills in India. By using Manchester cloth we would only waste our money, but by reproducing Manchester in India, we shall keep our money at the price of our blood, because our very moral being will be sapped, and I call in support of my statement the very mill-hands as witnesses. And those who have amassed wealth out of factories are not likely to be better than other rich men. It would be folly to assume that an Indian Rockefeller would be better than the American Rockefeller. Impoverished India can become free, but it will be hard for any India made rich through immorality to regain its freedom. . . .
>
> It is no easy thing to do away with a thing that is established. We, therefore, say that the non-beginning of a thing is supreme wisdom. We cannot condemn mill owners; we can but pity them. It would be too much to expect them to give up their mills, but we may implore them not to increase them. If they would be good, they would gradually contract their business. They can establish in thousands of households the ancient and sacred handlooms, and they can buy out the cloth that may thus be woven. Whether the mill owners do this or not, people can cease to use machine-made goods.

When the questioner remarked that printing machinery would be used to spread Gandhi's ideas in book form, he replied:

> This is one of those instances which demonstrate that sometimes poison is used to kill poison. This, then, will not be a good point regarding machinery. As it expires, the machinery, as it were, says to us: "Beware and avoid me. You will derive no benefits from me, and the benefit that may accrue from printing will avail only those who are infected with the machinery craze."

This heroic rejection of *all* machinery was qualified in the 1934 edition of *Hind Swaraj*. The editor, Mahadev Desai, included in his preface the reply to a question put to Gandhi in 1994. Asked whether he was indeed against *all* machinery, he said:

> How can I be when I know that even this body is a most delicate piece of machinery? The spinning-wheel is a machine; a little toothpick is a machine. What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labor-saving machinery. Men go on "saving labor" till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labor, not for a fraction of mankind but *for all.* I want the concentration of wealth, not in the hands of a few, but in the hands of all. Today machinery merely helps a few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labor, but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might. . . . The supreme consideration is man. The machine should not atrophy the limbs of man. For instance, I would make intelligent exceptions. Take the case of Singer's Sewing Machine. It is one of the few useful things ever invented, and there is a romance about the device itself.

Elsewhere Gandhi further explained that he favored machines "which do not deprive men o£ the opportunity to labor, but which help the individual and add to his efficiency, and which men can handle at will without being their slave." He even approved electricity for the villages since it would enable the villagers to use power tools in their homes. Gandhi's fundamental point was not concerned with the machine itself, but with its effect on human life. His praise of the spinning wheel makes this clear:

> The sole claim advanced on its behalf is that it *alone* offers an immediate, practicable and permanent solution to that problem of problems that confronts India: the enforced idleness for nearly six months in the year of an overwhelming majority of Indian population, owing to lack of supplementary occupation to agriculture and chronic starvation of the masses that results therefrom. I would favor the use of the most elaborate machinery if thereby India's pauperism and resulting idleness be avoided. I have suggested hand spinning as the only ready means of driving away penury and making famine of work and wealth impossible.

Yet the foundation of his attitude toward machinery remained unshaken. He concluded the 1924 conversation by saying:

> Ideally, I would rule out all machinery even as I would reject this very body, which is not helpful to salvation, and to seek the absolute liberation of the soul. From that point of view I would reject all machinery, but machines will remain because, like the body, they are inevitable. The body itself, as I told you, is the purest piece of mechanism, but if it is a hindrance to the highest flights of the soul, it has to be rejected.

Quite evidently, Gandhi's thinking is filled with heroic decisions, or what will seem heroic decisions to the vast majority of his readers. Yet that the body as well as certain useful machines are required for life on earth was plain enough to him, so that intelligent care and right use become the issue.

Gandhi knew that human opinions vary widely on such questions. What he believed about the organization of personal and community life is set forth in this early volume on self-rule for India, and later elaborated throughout other works which, when finally published, will occupy some eighty or ninety volumes. But in 1921 he said of *Hind Swaraj:*

> I would warn the reader against thinking that I am today aiming at the *Swaraj* described therein. I know that India is not ripe for it. It may seem an impertinence to say so. But such is my conviction. I am individually working for the self-rule pictured

> therein. But today my corporate activity is undoubtedly devoted to the attainment of Parliamentary *Swaraj* in accordance with the wishes of the people of India. I am not aiming at destroying railways or hospitals, though I would certainly welcome their natural destruction. Neither railways nor hospitals are a test of a high and pure civilization. At best they are a necessary evil. Neither adds one inch to the moral stature of a nation. Nor am I aiming at a permanent destruction of law courts, much as I regard it as a "consummation devoutly to be wished for." Still less am I trying to destroy all machinery and mills. It requires a higher simplicity and renunciation than the people are today prepared for.
>
> The only part of the programme which is now being carried out in its entirety is that of non-violence. But I regret to have to confess that even that is not being carried out in the spirit of the book. If it were, India would establish *Swaraj* in a day. If India adopted the doctrine of love as an active part of her religion and introduced it in her politics, *Swaraj* would descend upon India from heaven. But I am painfully aware that that event is far off as yet.

It may help the Western reader to understand a here like Gandhi to quote here from the opening editorial of a new Indian magazine devoted to Gandhi's philosophy—*Gandhi Vigyan*, edited by K. S. Acharlu, and published quarterly at 2-2-1133/5/5 New Nallakunta, Hyderabad-500 044, India. (Annual subscription, 10 rupees.) Speaking of Gandhi, the editor says:

> By staunch discipline he had educated his conscience and trained himself to listen to its whispers. But in mundane matters he was a rigid, rational thinker. . .
>
> Believing in the Vedantic doctrine of "liberation," he revived the philosophical ideas of the ancients and made strenuous efforts to mould his personal life for regaining the depth and profundity of ancient thought in the setting of contemporary experience. . . .
>
> He cared little for political economy, he cared about man and his destiny. And since he was deeply interested in human destiny he strove for the restoration of human dignity, freedom and self-respect. Since he treated man as an end and not a means, the villager who was exploited became his primary consideration. Through service of the hungry and the homeless, he strove to realize the spiritual welfare of mankind. The poverty and idleness of the millions of our country drove him to the brink of despair, and he felt deep anger at the injustice rendered to them. . . .
>
> Life today is so surcharged with complexities and contradictions that when we seek to solve any social, economic, educational or political issue, we cannot help gravitating to the area of Gandhian thought. We believe the time has come to develop philosophic thinking related to the various facets of life, national and international, based on the thoughts and actions associated with Gandhi. Without being blinded by the personality cult it is possible to lay emphasis on the concepts which Gandhiji dug out of ancient lore and applied to the conditions of the individual and social life, producing remarkable results unheard of in recent history.

One of those who gravitated naturally to the area os Gandhian thought was E. F. Schumacher. One could say that Schumacher's life-work has been to demonstrate the application of Gandhian thinking to the use of machines resulting in intermediate technology. When asked what was that first struck him on reading Gandhi, Mr. Schumacher replied:

> I discovered that Gandhi, who was celebrated as the father of India, saint and so on—I discovered that he was an economist; nobody had ever told me that. Of course I learned from Gandhi: he was one of the few people I could learn from. I realized what Gandhi was teaching—in nonacademic language—was real economics. I think of so many of my academic colleagues; they go from school to study, and from study to teaching—and in the process there is such a narrowing—though not a narrowing of your conceits! Well certainly Gandhi never studied economics; he learned by doing, and his whole outlook was to start with people. Now it's much more difficult if you've been brainwashed by economics; it took me a long while to discover that economics isn't about people but goods: "You have to produce more and more goods, and if millions are unemployed, well that's just too bad—give them welfare payments!" It was so much easier for Gandhi, involved in a political struggle as he was, relying on the people, to realize that economics is a kind of prostitution of the soul unless it is primarily concerned with poverty. Such a foreign idea for any economics faculty! Gandhi helped me to see this.

Reaching this conclusion was certainly, for an economist, a heroic decision. And so it is, also, for all who break out of the confines of an academic or professional calling and declare what they have found out by independent thinking.

What do these people then do, after they have made their heroic decision? The example they set is virtually uniform. They go to work to create social and economic relationships that will make it a little easier—not quite so heroic—for people to do the right thing. The more real understanding there is, the less heroism required, because enlightened common sense turns out to be on the side of the right thing. The social growth process involved—perhaps a psycho-social *law*—was well described by Henry T. Buckle in his *History of Civilization:*

> If either a religion or a philosophy is too much in advance of a nation it can do no present service but must bide its time until the minds of men are ripe for its reception. . . . Every science, every creed, has its martyrs. According to the ordinary course of affairs, a few generations pass away, and then there comes a period when these very truths are looked upon as commonplace facts, and a little later there comes another period in which they are declared to be necessary and even the dullest intellect wonders how they could ever have been denied.

REVIEW
REVIEW OF REVIEW

SINCE coming across informing and pleasurable reading is something of a rarity these days, we take time out from books to report on the *New York Review of Books.* We don't read this periodical regularly—time is a factor—but the Feb. 9 issue has nourishment from beginning to end. We decided that numerous apt and perceptive generalizations are the reason. The writing is skillful, the thinking clear, and in this issue the material seems of enduring value. The contributors are craftsmen who use ideas with balance and imagination.

We are saying, we suppose, that the skillful capacity to make a fine shape is likely to attract a worthy meaning. This seems true, for example, of T. S. Eliot as a poet, and it is also true of the essay on Eliot (nominally a review of three books about his life and work) by Irvin Ehrenpreis. Speaking of Eliot's use of the work of other writers—mostly earlier ones—Mr. Ehrenpreis says:

> In discussing Eliot's deliberate allusions, our danger is to take them as referring to concrete persons or situations, particularly to conditions of life or heroic figures of the past, supposed to be offered as preferable to those of our own time. But it is always a poet's rendering that Eliot retrieves for us, rather than a fact or deed in its nakedness.
>
> So he produces not the murder of Agamemnon but the tragic resonance of that crime for Aeschylus; not the routines of Italian monasteries under Boniface VIII, but Dante's idea of the contemplative life. Eliot had an ample supply of historical learning, and did not have to be told how much bleaker the circumstances of most men were in remote centuries than in the present. We are not asked to imitate the domestic manners of old heroes and saints but to discover ideal visions that can haunt us like theirs.
>
> So also in finding out images, Eliot strove to be true to himself without celebrating his personality. He wanted images to be authentic, and therefore drawn from his own experience—if possible, from the deepest level of that experience. But they were also to belong to the archetypal sensibility of mankind, or at least be such as evoke strong, lingering associations in most men.

Something of great importance is unspoken here, perhaps taken for granted. It concerns the natural task of the artist. The practice of his art obliges him to reach beyond himself, to do something in some sense for all men. There is always a giving in his calling, a purpose intrinsic to the art. One may not "like" Eliot's poetry, but this is a reason for understanding him better when an occasion for doing so arises. Mr. Ehrenpreis makes such an occasion and his essay may leave the reader with a richer appreciation of the poetic art. The few brief examples offered of Eliot's verse compel respect, and the poet's comment—"The rejection of rhyme is not a leap at facility; on the contrary it imposes a much severer strain upon the language"—may become the start of a train of fruitful reflections.

An article calling for at least two readings is John Updike's discussion of Walt Whitman.

> Whitman wrenched from American poetry the possibility of its being a mere craft, and thrust upon it the duty to be celebration and prophecy, to be, no less, a verbal appropriation of the universe. Further, he thrust upon America the idea that it was, this crass green nation, poetic. "The Americans of all nations at any time on earth have probably the fullest poetic nature. The United States are essentially the greatest poem."

Whitman set out to embody all America in himself and write his being into American history. Hence Mr. Updike's title, "Walt Whitman: Ego and Art." Whitman, you could say, demonstrated the unlimited possibilities of what psychologists call the "I am me" experience. His work is a saga of self-discovery—with the self becoming a vast territory coextensive with the poet's imaginative projection of what America is and might become. After suggesting that Whitman was an egoist, Mr. Updike explains

> By egoism is meant not the egoist's overvaluation of his own attributes—though Whitman *was* absurdly vain about his own body—but a recognition of each man's immersion in a unique and unexchangeable ego which is, in a sense, all he's got,

> but something he indeed does, short of madness and the grave, have. This has been true for all men in all times, but only an American, perhaps, could have proclaimed it as a discovery, as an astounding thing.

The critic finds particular virtue in the way Whitman balances his extravagances:

> The self he celebrated included a capacity for self-appraisal. His "Backward Glance" [in 1888] contains some very pragmatic sentences: "Behind all else that can be said, I consider 'Leaves of Grass' and its theory experimental—as, in the deepest sense, I consider our American republic itself to be, with its theory."
>
> I find that calm sentence thrilling, as I do the following: "Whatever may have been the case in years gone by, the true use for the imaginative faculty of modern times is to give ultimate vivification to facts, to science, and to common lives, endowing them with the glows and glories and final illustriousness which belongs to every real thing, and to real things only."

Two paragraphs from a review article on "Business" by Robert L. Heilbroner illustrate the apt generalizations we spoke of at the beginning:

> The business world creates a social landscape that envelopes us completely. Business is everywhere—in the shops and office buildings and factories; in the simplest products as well as the most complicated machines; in the unending barrage of commercial noise; in the moods of anxiety, anticipation, desperation, or just plain coping we experience in dally life. . . .
>
> Ewen's book [*Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*] is not therefore an "indictment" of advertising or a compendium of its more egregious vulgarities (although a number of these inevitably creep into the book). It is, rather, a discussion of the way in which advertising has "commodified" the conceptions people have of themselves—not merely about their physical allurements, cleanliness, breath and body odor, but about status, family authority, even love and death.

Advertising, in other words, is the salvation doctrine we have chosen to accept—involving the only currency of devotion we know: our money. Its function is to offer "a commodity self to people who were unhappy or could be convinced that they were unhappy about their lives."

In confirmation of this we recall a critical account of children's first-year-readers. Since the publisher sought a nationwide market—the schools in all the states—no local color could be permitted. In the thin little stories about children's doings, a common denominator was needed, and of course, *buying* something was the answer. The children went with mother to get T-shirts or candy or dolls. These climactic experiences all took place in stores.

A review we liked less well is Gore Vidal's report on the fifth volume of Robert Coles's *Children of Crisis*, called *Privileged Ones*, concerned with the children of the rich. As a piece of writing, the review is undeniably brilliant. Quite evidently, Mr. Vidal "likes" Dr. Coles and thinks well of his work, as who could not? But he doesn't just tell about it—he *contains* it. Yet the reader obtains a very good idea of what is in the book. The review is a thorough professional job.

But only one conclusion is inescapable for the reader: Mr. Vidal is on top of everything. Along with his mild generosities to the author, he says: "Yet no matter how far afield Dr. Coles goes, he is seldom able to tell us anything that we did not already know." At the same time, Vidal is extremely acute:

> The American vice is explanation. This is because there is so little conversation (known as "meaningful dialogue" to the explainers) in the greatest country in the history of the greatest world in the Milky Way. Dr. Coles is a born explainer and prone to loose rhetoric; given his "credentials," this is as it should be. But it is somewhat disturbing to find that most of the children are also great explainers. Admittedly, Dr. Coles is homogenizing their characters and prose in the interests of "representativeness" and "compositiveness"; as a result, not only do they sound like him, they also come through as a batch of born-explainers, faithfully reflecting the explanatory style of parents, teachers, television commercials.

Vidal is an artist with a clear sense of form. He knows instinctively that a work of art which turns human experience into an account having mythic clarity—such as a great novel—reveals

more about human beings than generalized case studies such as psychiatrists and other therapists produce. But why not credit Dr. Coles with a fine attempt to move the psychiatric report *toward* the authenticity of an art form? Such cultural transformations—of the method of psychoanalysis into a wider educational mode, of classification of illnesses into grasp of how a human being may struggle with himself and his circumstances—always proceed slowly, advancing step by step. Dr. Coles is a restorer—a partial restorer—of humanity to a specialty. Why not honor him instead of picking at him for only going part of the way?

Meanwhile, the reader is obliged to think about what Gore Vidal says in spite of his irritating omniscience.

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COMMENTARY
THE WRITER'S WORK

THE artist and the philosopher have in common one high and ennobling quality of human beings: the depth of what they accomplish depends upon the strength of their feelings of accountability to themselves. This was the only moral principle accorded importance by Socrates. A real artist feels shame when he realizes that he is not doing his best.

An article about the conscience of the writer in the *Saturday Review* for March 18, by Robertson Davies, a Canadian novelist, explores the importance of this sense of responsibility. While there are many kinds of writers, he says, if they are serious—more than "journalistic word-spinners" or mere technicians—they all have this distinguishing trait. He explains:

> Now—what is this conscience I have been talking about? It is the inner struggle toward self-knowledge and self-recognition, which he makes manifest through his art. Writers and artists generally, are notoriously resistant to psychoanalysis because they are continually psychoanalyzing themselves in their own way, which is through their work.

While Mr. Davies does not mention Herman Melville, the author of *Moby Dick* seems an ideal example of his point. In *The Long Encounter*, a study of Melville's search for the self, Merlin Bowen says:

> It may be questioned whether his books are stories or novels at all, in the customary meaning of those words: certainly plot and character are not their strong points. Nor do all of them have to do with the sea. But there is one thing that all of them have in common, and that is a concern with the problem of self-discovery, self-realization, and here—how different he was in other respects—Melville was at one with his age, with such men as Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and his exact contemporary Whitman.

Mr. Davies believes that this longing to know the self, and the persistent inquiry which results—he calls it "the continuing struggle that goes on in the psyche of every writer"—is felt by others and accounts for the general admiration of writers, spontaneous in so many people. This seems true enough. Yet all humans, when they are fulfilling the purpose of their lives, pursue this search. The writer's profession causes him to do it "in public," we might say. When he does it well, we all learn from him.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
SCHOOLING AND THINKING

A STAFF writer for the *Christian Science Monitor*, Roscoe Drummond, presented arguments for abolishing compulsory education in his column for Jan. 18. He starts out by saying that public school education is having such poor results that a crisis exists for the nation:

> The crisis is this: two vital trends are running in opposite directions. The need for thinkers is growing ever greater, the education required to produce thinkers is deteriorating.

This statement seems true enough, yet it may be irrelevant for the reason that the implication that public school education once produced thinkers, but no longer does so, may be challenged. The sort of evidence presented by Mr. Drummond is of interest. He quotes research by Herman Kahn's Hudson Institute to the effect that "the more parents have spent on the schools, the less children have learned." The conclusion that they are learning less is based on the fact that "scores on academic achievement tests, administered to various grades in most states, reveal that the academic performance of schoolchildren declined almost unremittingly in the second half of the 1960s and the first half of the 70s."

This depressing record is contrasted with last year's cost of primary and secondary schooling, which totalled $75 billion—four times the amount spent by the country for education in 1960. In short, the more we pay the less we get. But the question that should be asked is: Can education be bought with money?

Mr. Drummond asks another question and gives his answer:

> Why is the quality of public school teaching deteriorating? Why is the minimum standard of public education deteriorating? Why is the quality of poor students deteriorating and the quality of better students being dragged down toward the level of the poorer?
>
> I think the reason is that the public schools from kindergarten through high school are being overloaded with a high percentage of youngsters who are determined not to be educated, many of whom are unqualified to get an education are indifferent to their education, and treat school as a kind of compulsory halfway house to "freedom"—schools which many parents see as reformatories, not educational institutions.

The *Monitor* columnist quotes the solution offered by Robert Sipher, a professor of history at State University of New York, who has said:

> The solution to the problem is simple: abolish compulsory attendance laws and allow only those who are committed to getting an education to attend.
>
> Present mandatory-attendance laws force many to attend school who have no wish to be there. Such children are so antagonistic to school that neither they nor more highly motivated students receive the quality education that is the birthright of every American.

Mr. Drummond sums up:

> Every youth would be free to go to school as long as he showed he wanted to learn and could. But none would be compelled by law to do so.
>
> The consequences of such a policy could be massively beneficial.
>
> Teachers could begin to teach. Educators could resume educating. Students who wanted to learn would no longer be held back by teachers having to police the unwilling and the recalcitrant.
>
> Shouldn't our public schools be for education? They are now only incidentally so.

One might feel in basic agreement with this recommendation while rejecting almost entirely its supporting arguments. As dozens of critics have pointed out, it is the habit of many educational administrators to say, when the system is working poorly, that the children are at fault.

It may be entirely true that a great many of the young don't "respond" as they are expected to. The reasons for this are undoubtedly various and complex. A reading of books by Kozol (*Death at an Early Age*), Holt (*How Children Fail*), Kohl (36 *Children*), and Dennison (*The Lives of Children*) will result in distributing the "blame" more evenly, or rather will show how much more we need to know and understand before reaching any judgmental conclusion.

Nowhere in his little essay does Mr. Drummond raise the question of whether the "education" offered by the schools can do much of anything to produce "thinkers." Actually, there are no rules at all for producing thinkers, although environments hospitable to thinking can sometimes be devised. Thinking is strictly a self-motivated, voluntary activity, by no means reflected in the grades obtained in school. In fact, real thinking frequently interferes with getting good grades.

But why, in the first place, do we have a compulsory education system?

The reasons, again, are various, but the reasoning in its behalf may have begun with Comenius in the seventeenth century. Summarizing his outlook and proposals, Robert McClintock has written (*Teachers College Record,* December, 1971):

> Comenius cared nought for study; teaching and learning were his thing. He . . . set forth the techniques and principles by means of which teachers were to impart knowledge, virtue, and faith to empty minds "with such certainty that the desired result must of necessity follow." . . . Here is the basis for our cult of the degree; and Comenius' faith in the power of the school has no bounds: he even suggested that had there been a better school in Paradise, Eve would not have made her sore mistake, for she "would have known that the serpent is unable to speak, and that there must therefore have been some deceit." . . .
>
> All the basic concerns of modern Western education were adumbrated in [Comenius'] *The Great Didactic.* there was to be universal, compulsory, extended instruction for both boys and girls in efficient, well-run schools in which teachers, who have been duly trained in a "Didactic College," were to be responsible for teaching sciences, arts, languages, morals, and piety by following an exact order derived from nature and by using tested, efficacious principles. This outline has been given fleshly substance; initiative has everywhere been thoroughly shifted from the student to the teacher, a world of instruction has completely displaced the bygone world of study.

Study, we should explain, is used here by Mr. McClintock to mean the self-initiated pursuit of learning. It is well illustrated by what Dorothy Samuel wrote some years ago (1965):

> On every college campus will be found unfashionably clad students lolling in cheap rooms, reading inexpensive paperbacks or second-hand editions of great books. . . . They browse among the courses and disciplines. If a book speaks to their condition, they may skip a few weeks' required work to peruse everything the author wrote. When the grade card reflects what they did not learn rather than what they did learn, they couldn't care less. Top grades are meaningful only to employers; these students have not seen any jobs worth doing. . . . And so, the exodus has begun. In ones and twos, undramatically, thoughtful lads and lasses are dropping out of college, at least off and on, so they will have time to think. . . .

They are not dropping out of "compulsory" schooling when they leave a college or university, but what appears to be indifference or rebellion in grade and high school may become deliberate decision during the college years.

Of course, the most familiar thinking in behalf of compulsory schooling grows out of the idea that a school population having diverse sources—lots of children of immigrants—needs to be properly "Americanized" in order to have good citizens. How can they obey the law if they can't read? How can they be patriotic if they are not taught history from our point of view? How can industry have a proper labor force if young people remain illiterate?

But when all these reasons wear thin morally, and when the purposes of the State become increasingly indifferent to human good, schooling animated by these traditional motives becomes less and less sincere, more and more routine.

The children sense the moral decline without understanding it, and begin to dislike school without really knowing why. This is surely part of the explanation for the growing indifference to schooling.

In short, the whole question of what education means needs rethinking. And a critical review of the arguments for compulsory education would help to provoke the questions that need attention, the most basic being: How shall we go about changing the whole environment which affects the young, of which schools are now only a somewhat ineffectual part?

FRONTIERS

Balances on the Way

ISAIAH BERLIN begins his study of the mind of Leo Tolstoy by quoting a line from the ancient Greek poet, Archilochus, who said: "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." The fox is a scientist who confronts the world in all its diversity and learns to deal with portions of it with elaborately developed skills. The hedgehog is a mystic and philosopher, an intuiter of meaning on which he places the highest value. There is a fox and a hedgehog, more or less at odds, in each of us, and contrasting human activities come to typify these two aspects of human nature. Getting and keeping them in balance is the art of life.

Professional people, we could say, are foxes. They know a lot of little things (about their specialties) and we call on them when we need a particular kind of help. It is the contention of Ivan Illich—and others who agree with him that the professions have become so important to us that they exercise tyrannical power over our lives. No longer do they help us only when we need them; now they tell us when and how much we need them, and their growing authority makes it impossible for us to do without them even when we don't really need help at all.

Evidence for this indictment is presented in *Disabling Professions*, a paperback issued last year by an English publisher, Marion Boyars (London), at $4.95. The authors are Illich and four other contributors. As Illich says, to reject the more than royal authority of the professionals is to be branded a heretic. The value of the book lies in the fresh critical perspectives of these writers. Their idea is to help the reader to release himself from habits of thinking which make him a natural victim of presumptuous professional management. Illich holds out some hope:

> Thousands of individuals and groups now challenge professional dominance over themselves and the socio-technical conditions in which they live. They do so by the questions they ask and the style of life which they consciously create. In the social wasteland that sprawls between the unionized dullness of Middle America and the smug spirituality of orthodox protest, I continually bump into these people and tribes. True, they are a disparate lot, only seeing through the smog darkly. But they begin to recognize what they must abandon to live. Further, groups continue to amaze themselves because of their tolerance for the quite different style in which the tribe squatting on the next plot chooses to live. . . . The age of Disabling Professions may very well close when these silent minorities can clarify the philosophical and legal character of what in common *they do not want.* . . .
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> But the post-professional society cannot be summed up, nor, by its very essence, can its design characteristics be predicted or predicated. We are incapable of imagining what free men can do when equipped with modern tools respectfully constrained. The Post-Professional Ethos will hopefully result in a social panorama more colorful and diverse than all the cultures of past and present taken together.

Illich, of course, wants the professionals to reform, too, but the emphasis in this book is on liberating ourselves from their authoritative control. Paul Goodman, a man often exposed to youthful rebels against authority, began his plea for change with emphasis on the need for *responsible* professionals:

> I asked them to envisage any social order they pleased—Mao's, Castro's, some anarchist utopia—and wouldn't there be engineers who knew about materials and stresses and strains? Wouldn't people get sick and need to be treated? . . . No. It was necessary only to be human, they insisted, and all else would follow.
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> Suddenly I realized that they did not believe in a nature of things. . . . I now saw that we had to do with a religious crisis. Not only all institutions but all learning had been corrupted by the Whore of Babylon, and there was no longer any salvation to be got from Works.

Goodman wanted professionals who would help people to become less dependent on specialists. He wanted them to be professional foxes endowed with strong hedgehog tendencies. Without this balance in people of every sort there can never be a balance in society.

This explains the great timeliness of E. F. Schumacher's proposal and appeal: Intermediate Technology is a kind of technology which places the right amount of the fox's special know-how within reach of the average person. He will still call on the professionals, but according to *his* sense of need, not theirs. This is probably the best that we can do.

Meanwhile, a great wave of longing and considerable practical effort is going into the attempt to rearrange our lives with a better balance between independence and reliance on others. Writers contribute their talents at different levels, but nobody—as Illich says—really knows how it will all come out. Planners and architects get fired up and rush to the drawing board to record their dreams. Simultaneously a fellow no one ever heard of goes to work in his garage and creates a windmill out of junk, or a low-cost heat storage system as efficient as anything produced by a high-priced engineer. How do you lure these backyard Archimedians into print so that the rest of us can obtain encouragement and daring from their ingenuity? Riding around in a car looking for them is not the way.

Well, one familiar method is to offer prizes. More than two years ago some people in the University of Minnesota, joined by others, decided to have a competition, then an exhibition, and a publication showing the resourcefulness of residents of Minnesota. Three groups of people took part in a project called *Environmental Design: Native Wit.*

Huldah Curl, project director and editor of the book of that title, explains:

> The first [group] is the designing and building professions and trades and their students. The second is the alternative life style and appropriate technology associations throughout the state. But there is a third and unpredictable group, increasing in size every day. People are turned up by the most casual contacts who are doing projects on their own initiative: an insurance executive, a couple of farmers, an art historian, several homemakers, an airports director, a computer analyst for the postal service, a manager of a donut shop, an artist, a lawyer, and just plain backyard tinkerers and scavengers who are using their own curiosity and imagination.

The book is a fascinating mix of the slick and the grubby, with photographs that sometimes mystify instead of inform, drawings that don't always show what you'd like to see, and some descriptions you can't understand very well without either more or less detail. But the *esprit de corps* generated by the more than seventy contributors is great, and some of the ideas seem enormously provocative. (Available from Mailing Services, University of Minnesota, 2818 Como Avenue S.E., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455, at $4.95.) There are sections on planning (town. and neighborhood), shelter, energy generation, and transport—each showing either finished projects or proposals of ways of doing things that at least seem new and practical. The emphasis is right—a lot on solar (active and passive) construction, several underground dwellings, with good attention to wind energy and protection from weather. Well covered is methane production, which could do a lot for Minnesota. What the backyard people accomplished appeals most to the ordinary reader. As a whole, the book reveals how much is going on in independent design for better relations with the earth and one another—to produce, some day, "a social panorama more colorful and diverse."