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THE DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

AFTER a stint of reading in a learned quarterly—concerned with whether or not there can be a "new America," and if there can, what it might be like—one is likely to be impressed in two ways. First, that we know so much about our society—all those figures, interpretations, trends, and expectations; second, by the feeling of impotence which overtakes the individual, *any* individual, whether or not he has what we call "power" or "authority." In other words, we seem extraordinarily well-informed about all the problems which are out of scale for individual choice and action, while knowing next to nothing about what as persons we ought and may be able to do next.

The situation seems ridiculous, but this may be no more than the result of regarding the human situation in an unaccustomed light. That is, having all this historical and sociological knowledge at our disposal, yet feeling helpless, makes a ridiculous contrast. If we didn't "know" so much, we'd probably be better able to cope.

One of the contributors to the learned quarterly the Winter 1978 *Dædalus*—begins his discussion of "Changing Religious Values" in America with some thinking along these lines. This writer, Sydney E. Ahlstrom, who teaches religious history at Yale, starts out:

> *A new America?* The question raises a host of imponderables. One remembers Ralph Waldo Emerson's misgivings In the early 1850s, "It chanced during one winter a few years ago, that our cities were bent on discussing the theory of the Age. By an odd coincidence four or five noted men were each reading a discourse to the citizens of Boston or New York, on the Spirit of the Times." Emerson, however could not join the dialogue. "We are incompetent to solve the times. Our geometry cannot span the huge orbits of the prevailing ideas, behold their return and reconcile their opposition. We can only obey our polarity." He spoke of the Turk's sense of preordained destiny and of the Hindu's patient resignation. "Our Calvinists in the last generation had something of the same dignity. They felt that the Universe held them down to their place." "Providence," he said "has a wild, rough, incalculable road to its end, and it is of no use to try to whitewash its huge mixed instrument in the clean shirt and white neckcloth of a student of divinity."

Despite this warning, Mr. Ahlstrom does what he can. Naturally enough, his thoughtful account ends with the conclusion, "America has a clouded future." And for the reader the suspicion comes that he might better have spent his time reading more in Emerson.

Against the grain of the immediate past, people are beginning to look up Emerson. In *Liberation* for last fall, Martin Duberman explains his neglect by recent generations, then gives some reasons for turning to him in the present:

> Emerson has always been a most unmanageable figure. The problem is his plenitude, his multiplicity of insights and personae. He's the silly-putty of American letters. No sooner does his image seem fixed than it dissolves. No sooner does he seem to declare decisively on this or that question than he shifts ground—and often the question. This can be especially galling because of Emerson's serene acceptance of his own equivocations, his apparent belief that elusiveness is a virtue and consistency a failure of the imagination. He will disavow no mood, even after it passes. He retains affection for all his opinions, however much they change, for he views all as aspects of his singular self.

The same might be said of Emerson's view of the altering conditions of the world, which we read according to our interest rather than any underlying "reality." But such willing flexibility, Mr. Duberman says, "is highly offensive in a culture dedicated to categorizing, intolerant of ambiguity."

> Through the years, most of my students have dismissed Emerson as a hopeless hypocrite; and in drawing that indictment, they've had no trouble finding innumerable instances of contradiction in his

> thought. On the one hand, Emerson asserts the absolute claims of the self, the need to reject the world's "conspiracy to importune you with emphatic trifles," the illusion of change ("dream delivers us to dream"), the misplaced emphasis of social reformers ("it is easy to live for others; everybody does"). "Stand apart" seems to be the sum of Emerson's philosophy: "in silence, in steadiness, in severe abstraction, let him hold by himself."
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> And yet . . . turn a page in Emerson's writings, pick up another essay, and the disdainful Olympian transforms into the egalitarian democrat, the elitist praises the insights of the common man, the hermit scholar disdains books as crutches, "the resorts of the feeble and the lame," the radical individualist demands that attention be paid to the claims of the world and action be taken against social injustice ("It is in vain you pretend you are not responsible for the evil law . . . hiding like an ostrich. . . .")

In the 50s, Mr. Duberman says, his students found Emerson "boring: too serious, too introspective, too abstract." And in the 60s "they found him repellent: over-cultivated, indifferent to suffering."

But today, most of his students find "something to identify with in Emerson, something to admire."

> Sometimes a single line spoke to them: "Society is a masked ball where everyone hides his real character, and reveals it by hiding." . . . "I like the silent church before the service begins, better than any preaching." (*"Exactly* what I feel," one woman said, "reverence for what is universal, impatience with all moralizing that pretends to derive from it.") The more conservative students latched on to "Many a reformer perishes in his removal of rubbish;" the more liberal ones liked "Men in all ways are better than they seem." But far and away the favorite was the line "Perhaps all that is not performance is preparation, or performance shall be."

Before taking leave of Emerson we should like to add a favorite quotation of our own, taken from the essay cited in *Dædalus*, on Fate:

> One key, one solution to the mysteries of human condition, one solution to the old knots of fate, freedom, and foreknowledge, exists, the propounding, namely, of the double consciousness. A man must ride alternately on the horses of his private and his public nature, as the equestrians in the circus throw themselves nimbly from horse to horse, or plant one foot on the back of one, and the other foot on the back of the other.

Such agile transfers of attention from the personal to the public point of view, and back again, doubtless seemed quite possible in Emerson's time. Yet Emerson might still contend that we delude ourselves in thinking that we are unable to make decisions or act unless we are well informed about "everything"—which is the condition science has set as a goal. We are not unmanned by our ignorance; we have only to admit it and then deal with what we do understand, in both private and public relations. The admission comes first, to clear the air. The uninhibited candor of the artist is of help in this. The artist, whatever his shortcomings, has the habit of thinking in terms of wholes, and his constructions must work and have life. He will not act in areas darkened by too much complexity. Years ago, George P. Elliot, a novelist, wrote in the *Nation* (Nov. 14, 1959):

> Nothing is harder than to have a clear, steady and sound idea of what society is and what it should be. I must speak for myself: I realize that I could not define the word to anyone's satisfaction; like many, I sometimes in desperation identify society with the state—whence horrors ensue. The word "democratic" has ceased to have any more independent meaning than the word "united" in United States. We have no good analogy by which to comprehend our society.

The work, and therefore the thinking, of the artist cannot include too many unknowns. While he must leave something for us to discover, he must also give us enough to work with. An end-of-the-line futility becomes apparent in a Kafkaesque world of overwhelming complexity. The result is defeat for both the artist and the individual human. Neither can accept this situation. The teacher is in the same position. He must find some way of managing in a society that has grown too big for ordinary human understanding.

A few years ago, at the end of *The Underachieving School* (Pitman, 1969), John Holt gave his personal solution. The trouble with depending on "research" to show the way, he said, is that "by the time the experts have collected enough data to feel they're sure of what they're doing, the situation will have changed and they will no longer be doing the right thing." There is a way of living without experts:

> Well, the question then is, if piling up bodies of knowledge and expert data—if packing our heads full of ideas faster and faster—is not the answer, what is it, then, we have to do?
>
> In this connection I think of a letter a student of mine wrote me when she was in college. I had taught this girl in the ninth grade, and again in the eleventh grade. When she was in her second year of college she wrote me a letter talking of many things, and at one point she said, "What I envy about you, John, is that you have everything all taped." . . . she meant I had everything all figured out, in its place, organized, and so forth.
>
> Now I don't blame her for feeling this. This is precisely the picture that most educators try to give children of what it means to be educated: that you have everything all taped. You not only know everything, you know where it fits and how its parts relate to each other. This poor girl, in her confusion and ignorance and bafflement, wrote how much she envied me. I supposedly had everything all figured out. I wrote her back and said, "You could not possibly be more mistaken. The difference between you and me is not that I have everything all taped, it's that I know I don't and I never will, I don't expect to and I don't need to. I expect to live my entire life about as ignorant and uncertain and confused as I am now, and I have learned to live with this, not to worry about it. I have learned to swim in uncertainty the way a fish swims in water."
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> It seems to me that it is only in this way that it is possible to live in the kind of rapidly changing world that we live in. We are obliged to act, in the first place, and in the second place to act intelligently, or as intelligently as possible, in a world in which, as I say, we know very little, in which, even if the experts know more than we do, we have no way of knowing which expert knows the most. In other words, we are obliged to live out our lives thinking, acting, judging on the basis of the most fragmentary and uncertain and temporary information.

Well, we have both our private and public lives to live, and a natural question would be: How can we combine the two with the least uncertainty and confusion?

The books by the scholars, who are in some sense experts, have a use in relation to this inquiry. Sometimes they narrow the problem down to manageable size. For example, in *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect,* Robert Heilbroner says:

> Unlike the threats posed by population growth or war, there is an ultimate certitude about the problem of environmental deterioration that places it in a different category from the dangers we have previously examined. Nuclear attacks may be indefinitely avoided; population growth may be stabilized; but ultimately there is an absolute limit to the ability of the earth to support or tolerate the process of industrial activity, and there is reason to believe that we are now moving toward that limit very rapidly.

With a statement like that, we are back in the realm of common sense. The private merges with the public in such a situation. As Herbert Hollomon put it in the *Saturday Review* more than ten years ago:

> Today you and I can buy a house, but we cannot buy an attractive city; you and I can buy a car but we cannot buy an efficient highway; you and I can pay tuition for a son to go to college, but we cannot buy an educational system. The public—in the small or large—buys these public goods: school systems, cities, suburbs, road systems, air pollution control systems, airways systems. Today an increasing share of your and my money is being spent for public goods. This is because we live closer together, and have become more interacting and interdependent than we ever were before.

Why is there continual degradation of the quality of what we buy together as public benefits? The answer is that since there are more of us, and since we live closer together, the incompatibilities of technical objectives are making themselves felt more and more. There is no overall understanding of the good of man, but merely the highly skilled pursuit of ends which turn out to be in opposition to one another. As Mr. Hollomon says:

> It is a travesty, in my view, that engineers are responsible for the design of vehicles in which so many people are killed or maimed. It is a travesty that engineers are responsible for the design of industrial plants that pollute our atmosphere and our streams. Engineers must feel a sense of moral values through which they weigh the consequences for good of their work and make some judgments between them.

Even government regulation remains unpromising, since, quite apart from the political partisanship which affects most governmental decisions, there are the blinders which law imposes on public agencies. As a report on technology assessment in the *Scientific American* (February, 1970) pointed out:

> The predominant mission of each agency, as set forth in the law, sets forth its pattern of assessing technology. Weather modification provides an example. The Bureau of Reclamation looks for ways to increase rainfall in the dry Western states. The Department of Agriculture, mainly concerned with reducing crop losses, sponsors research in suppressing storm damage. The Federal Aviation Administration is interested in ways to dissipate fogs that hang over airports. None of these agencies considers total effects. In the case of regulatory agencies, limitations by law often prevent the agency from considering the complete problem. . . .
>
> The achievement of a better system for assessing technology faces major obstacles. The society is ill-equipped to handle conflicting interests. It does not know how to value in a quantitative way such goals as a clean environment and the preservation of future choices. Analytical tools are primitive and crucial knowledge is often missing.

These troubles seem natural enough in a society based on the proposition that the public good is somehow served by the unremitting pursuit of private interest. There is simply no accumulated background of ideas, no habitual thinking about the public good, except in vague statistical terms. A writer in *Alternatives to Growth,* Robert Allen, gives the psychological consequences of reliance on self-interest:

> If and when the increase of material wealth becomes more difficult, its quality is sacrificed seemingly without a qualm so long as the quantity is maintained. . . . This unhappy process is occurring because technologism, the driving force of the industrial way of life, is an unusually expensive way of satisfying human needs. Its propellant is consumerism, a form of economic addiction whereby luxuries are turned into essentials. . . . The growth and maintenance of an industrial economy demands that luxuries become essentials, but each transformation of a luxury into an essential requires the commitment of that much more energy, capital, and effort for essentially the same return (in terms of the satisfaction of human needs). . . . By virtue of the fact that luxuries become essentials and "needs" proliferate, all that is achieved by growth of GNP is the provision of progressively inferior compensations for more serious deprivations.

If this is a general rule applying to the decline of a society like ours, then *of course* we cannot buy an attractive city or a good educational system, or clean air, pure water, sensible, convenient transport, or even simple quiet. There is a sense, therefore, in which Emerson's "double-consciousness"—the private and the public is unified through dire necessity. Yet we are still confronted by the complications John Holt describes, and still feel the impotence we spoke of at the beginning, when we turn for help to the analyses of the experts. But there are also other developments. The rising interest in "voluntary simplicity" is one of them, and the number of people who have found alternatives to the acquisitive pursuits of the existing society has grown large enough to attract both journalistic and sociological attention. Inventive individuals are devising ways of life in which public and private and also natural—interests are joined.

Bill McLarney, one of the New Alchemists at Woods Hole, Mass. put the spirit of these undertakings quite simply. He said:

> Well, I don't suppose any of us is fool enough to think that we can save the world. But if each of us were to look at some of the directions we'd like to see the world go in—and then put our own little bit of force behind one of them—and to have a hell of a good time while we're doing it well then, that's what we should do.

While the language is not quite Emersonian, Emerson would, we think, have wholly approved.

REVIEW
GALILEO IN RETROSPECT

IN *Reflections on Men and Ideas* (M.I.T. Press, 1968), Gorgio de Santillana concludes a discussion of the silencing of Galileo with a quotation from Albert Einstein. The passage *is* taken from "a much-neglected essay":

> Physical theory has two ardent desires: to gather up as far as possible all pertinent phenomena and their connections, and to help us not only to know *how* Nature is and *how* her transactions are carried through, but also to reach as far as possible the perhaps utopian and seemingly arrogant aim of knowing why Nature is *thus and not otherwise*. Here lies the highest satisfaction of a scientific person . . . one experiences, so to speak, that God himself could not have arranged those connections [as for example those between pressure, volume, and temperature] in any other way than that which factually exists, any more than it would be in His power to make the number 4 into a prime number. This is the Promethian element of the scientific experience. . . . Here has always been for me the particular magic of scientific considerations; this is, as it were, the religious basis of scientific effort.

What has this to do with Galileo's trouble with the Church? Galileo, de Santillana shows, dared to claim, with persuasions so well constructed that they seemed irresistible, that God had no choice—that he *must* have constructed the universe in the manner that Copernicus had revealed. The offense was plain: A God without a choice is not a God—not, that is, a God who can do anything he likes. And this, in turn, meant that the will of God could no longer be called "inscrutable." Galileo was proposing to tell—he told—how things *had* to be, which amounted to establishing the rules to which the Creator had to conform. Anyone who could make the Creator conform was not a person who could be allowed to publish his opinions in the seventeenth century.

The books of de Santillana are all concerned with the history of ideas, yet they read like adventure stories, which of course they are. His scholarship and erudition are in evidence, yet never intrude to spoil the story. The story of Galileo is one of his best. This pioneer astronomer, who believed he had a good friend in the Pope, had no idea of the serious difficulties he would get into:

> As Galileo said, why should we be called innovators and trouble-makers, if what we have been able to prove demonstrably belongs to God's eternal truths that only the ignorance of men could have obscured? There was no fear in the souls of Galileo's own Church friends—those who were able to understand him—but a serene happiness worthy of old Medieval Christianity, for they were sure that no discovery of God's works could threaten God's word but rather enhance it. The "new philosophy," far from putting all in doubt, was a vividly affirmative one and full of great hope.

This being the case, why shouldn't Galileo take a further look at the Copernican theory? What harm could it do? While Copernicus' doctrine had been banned in 1616 as against both philosophy and Scripture, a literary review of the competing theories would show that due consideration had been given the matter by the Church. Pope Urban agreed, and authorized Galileo to write *Dialogue of the Great World Systems*. As de Santillana says:

> . . . the Pope now yielded good-naturedly to Galileo's entreaties for a fresh discussion of the problem with the understanding that any system of the universe cannot but remain a pure hypothesis, a "mere" mathematical model. He assumed it was well understood that the actual truth is beyond our reach and that God could have produced the same observable effects in infinitely many ways, for we must not constrain omnipotence within the limits of our particular imagination. In fact, the Pope actually dictated this conclusion in advance and then left his friend Galileo free to display what he was pleased to call his admirable and delectable ingenuity.

Galileo seemed to assent, but his real intention was "vastly different." He thought his proofs so strong that the Church would drop the veto against Copernicus and adjust the theological teaching of celestial reality.

> There was thus a deep miscomprehension from the start. . . . The manuscript was submitted to the Church censors, examined word for word, and came out with official approval. The censors found it good

> and full of laudable reverence. The *Dialogue of the Great World Systems* came out in 1632; it was an instant enthusiastic success—then all at once the authorities realized that they had made a frightful mistake. The usual advisors rushed to tell the Pope that, under pretense of following his instructions, the work was really a demolition charge planted by an expert, that it made a shambles of official teaching, and that it was apt to prove more dangerous to Catholic prestige than Luther and Calvin put together.

The Pope was doubly enraged when he discovered that Galileo had added the conclusion given him as a perfunctory tag at the end. But the astronomer had the law on his side. He had obtained official permission to write. What could be done to silence his impudence and remove its threat?

The Pope did not lack for resources:

> At this point the Inquisition "discovered" in the files a heaven-sent forgotten document. That document gave out that *when* Galileo was informed of the anti-Copernican decree in 1616, the Commissary General of the Inquisition had been present and served a stringent personal injunction on the astronomer to cease and desist from ever discussing it verbally or in writing, in any way whatsoever, under the dire penalties of the Holy Office.
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> This changed the figure of Galileo from that of a harmless respected consultant to that of a man considered by the Inquisition a dangerous suspect and held under surveillance by the thought police. By disregarding the injunction, he had exposed himself to being considered as obdurate heretic, which meant death at the stake. The authorities could try him at last. They had now an airtight case. They could even afford to be lenient and so let Galileo off with a public adjuration and a life sentence, which was further commuted into house arrest.
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> The trouble is that the famous injunction was a forgery: a false record carefully planted by the Inquisitors in their secret file in case it might come in handy. It did. Galileo had never dreamed of it, and that explains why he did not ask the Pope for explicit clearance before he raised the dangerous subject again.
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> The forgery, or rather the plant, has been proved beyond doubt by historical research over a century, and the best proof is that when I published the findings in systematic form in 1955, not one authorized voice was raised to contradict me . . . the authorities preferred to stand by their ancient decision, as a distinguished cleric remarked out of turn, probably because, however faulty juridically, it represented a philosophical decision concerning the spirit of modern science from which the Catholic Church still remains unwilling to withdraw.

To show the kinship of Galileo with Einstein, de Santillana relates an incident which reveals that Galileo's real offense was telling how the will of God works:

> At one point before the trial, the Pope gave audience to the Florentine Ambassador who had come again to plead desperately for Galileo. "I made free to remark to His Beatitude," reports the Ambassador, "that since God could have made the world in infinitely many ways, it could not be denied that this might have been one of those ways, as Il Signor Galileo thought he had discovered." At which the Pope, red in the face and pounding the padded armrest of his pontifical chair, shouted, "We must not necessitate God Almighty, do you understand?"

This was the real scandal of Galileo's argument—not merely his support of Copernicus, but his *method.*

> Necessitating is indeed the fatal word that marks our science. Where there is mathematical deduction of reality, there is necessity itself, that which could not be otherwise. . . . There is an identity at that point between man's mind and God's.

The Ambassador from Florence, Niccolini, knew it was time to withdraw:

> "As I saw his temper rising high, I passed on to another subject, for I did not care to run perchance into some heresy, and I wanted to stay clear of the Holy Office."

The story of Galileo's offense and persecution is told at length in de Santillana's book, *The Crime of Galileo,* published in 1955. Interestingly, Lewis Mumford, in *The Pentagon of Power,* heads a section with the same title, finding the astronomer guilty of an offense which he could not have been aware of: "his real crime was that of trading the totality of human experience, not merely the accumulated dogmas of the Church, for that minute portion which can be observed within a limited time-span and interpreted in terms of mass and motion, while denying importance to the unmediated realities of human experience." This was the well-known division between the primary and secondary qualities of things, the primary ones being the data of physical science—all that Galileo cared about. The secondary qualities—involving the perceptions of the inner man—could hardly be inspected by Galileo's methods. The astronomer got the ideas about the macrocosm straightened out, but he ignored the microcosm—man—entirely. As Mumford puts it:

> In dismissing subjectivity he had excommunicated history's central subject, multidimensional man. Galileo committed this crime with a cheerful heart and open eyes. He had no notion that his radical distinction between the external world and the internal world, between the objective and the subjective, between the mathematically describable, and thus knowable, and the irreducible, inaccessible, unanalyzable, and unmeasurable, was a false distinction. . . .

Tired of the pretensions of scholastic ignorance, Galileo inaugurated modern science with a powerful tract for his times. One may wonder whether all polemics hide similarly innocent crimes.

COMMENTARY
THE ARGUMENT ABOUT SCHOOLS

TEN years ago (in the *Progressive* for January, 1968) James Farmer declared that the black man in America has the contradictory task of strengthening and improving his urban ghettos while at the same time getting out of them. Neither goal, he suggested, should obscure the importance of the other.

This idea has a vague and imperfect parallel in the issue argued by Len Solo in this week's "Children." Toward the end of his discussion he seems to say that schools have been burdened with many responsibilities which really belong to home and community. Homes are broken, he suggests, and communities are weak, so that the school has little choice—it *must* try to do what is required. His own school seems to be doing it as well—or better than can be expected. It is evident to him that such responsibilities ought to be fulfilled. Why, then, declare for schoolless education in the home? Moreover, "socialization" is a need of every child, and it is obtained in school.

John Holt starts at the other end. Not many schools, he might say, are as good as the Cambridge Alternative Public School. He will argue from a general cultural reality, on the ground that a few exceptions do not alter the situation. The remedy for distorted and distorting institutions is to remove from them the responsibilities they ought not to carry and to withdraw the authority and power they have obtained by being expected to carry them. Holt wants parents to function as parents should, and as they ought to be able to. Doing this would reduce the authority of the schools. In our institutionalized society, a legal consequence would be necessary—abolishing *compulsory* public education. When this is the goal, you are likely to concentrate on the steps that will begin to bring it about. Of great help would be clear evidence that parents can take their children out of school and do a far better job of giving them education. It seems probable that if enough parents did this, great changes would come about in both our culture and our institutions. Changes for the better.

John Holt, one might say, has his eye on this far-off goal, a goal that cannot possibly be reached unless at least a few pioneers now start acting in its behalf—doing what is necessary to get things moving in the right direction. Advance toward reaching the goal would mean more self-conscious communities, general concern for the welfare of the young, with no need to pass punitive laws to assure that children aren't neglected or abused. With all this accomplished, such schools as we need would be community affairs, managed by parents and unhampered by bureaucratic tyrannies. Notable is the fact that Len Solo's school, even today, is a school which was created by a hundred or so families determined to have *their* kind of school, parents who had experience in taking responsibility and were ready to take on more. Those parents, in fact, were themselves a kind of "community," and they were actually able to get a school that, more or less, represented what they were after.

A word on "socialization." Children do need to learn to get along with each other, and with adults. And it is true enough that home life by no means accomplishes this in the way that it did centuries or even fifty years ago. But it should be acknowledged that quite often socialization includes the homogenization of all the petty vulgarities of the age—exposure to a constant stream of undesirable influences that can at least be thinned out in the home. The social life of a school, in other words, is a mixed good, and some children survive quite well without exposure to it.

Finally, common sense suggests that John Holt is by no means telling parents *en masse* to take their children out of school. This would be as silly as the demands of the "total revolutionists." He is appealing—has said so—to a small minority of parents who feel able, or would like to feel able, to teach their children themselves. It would be good for them to do this, he thinks, and good for their children. In general, he wants parents to stop thinking it is perfectly all right to ship their young off every morning to some massive structure several miles away—or even around the corner—and to assume that all will be well if *somebody* looks after their needs.

Would there be *no* schools in an ideal society? Sometimes, perhaps, John Holt seems to think so. But we doubt that he really does. Schools, Arthur Morgan once pointed out, arose to satisfy the need for specialized training, created by the progress in scientific and technical learning in the West, bringing the desire for training the young could not get at home. However much we are able to simplify our lives, this need will probably continue. But the schools to provide it could certainly be less formal, less pretentious, having only an earned authority.

Schools that do what is really needed, and no more, with parents who establish and control them, would certainly put an end to this argument.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

SCHOOL, HOME AND COMMUNITY

> [Len Solo, principal of the Cambridge (Mass.) Alternative Public School, here contributes a spirited defense of *good* schools, contrasting his views with John Holt's general position that many children would be better off if they were taught at home by their parents. He says Holt is "dead wrong," yet one of Holt's objectives is the reduction of the arbitrary power of schools, and judging from Solo's account of his own school (MANAS, March 8) he agrees with Holt to this extent, since he says that "parents, by virtue of being parents, have the right to determine and control their children's education." If more schools encouraged this right, John Holt would probably not be campaigning so vigorously against them, nor would Illich have written *Deschooling Society*. Actually, all three of these teachers are concerned with what is good for children. The means they find available are all imperfect, since people are less than perfect and society is riddled with corresponding flaws, more noticeable because institutionalized. Dewey's attempt, for example, to make the schools more like "life" failed, not because it was a bad idea, but because it was trivialized and made artificial by administrators and teachers who couldn't distinguish between form and substance. From this we learn that schools make a poor substitute for the lessons learned in a good community. Schools ought to bring into focus the best the community has to offer, but before that can happen real community must first exist.]

THIS letter is in response to "Toward Paideia" in the Feb. 8 MANAS, which I found quite naive and want to counteract. I would first like to quote from John Dewey's *Democracy and Education:*

> The primary ineluctable facts of the birth and death of each one of the constituent members in a social group determine the necessity of education. On the one hand, there is the contrast between the immaturity of the new-born members of the group—its future sole representatives—and the maturity of the adult members who possess the knowledge and customs of the group. On the other hand, there is the necessity that these immature members be not merely physically preserved in adequate numbers, but that they be initiated into the interests, purposes, information, skill, and practices of the mature members: otherwise the group will cease its characteristic life. Even in a savage tribe (sic), the achievements of adults are far beyond what the immature members would be capable of if left to themselves. With the growth of civilization, the gap between the original capacities of the immature and the standards and customs of the elders increases. Mere physical growing up, mere mastery of the bare necessities of subsistence will not suffice to reproduce the life of the group. Deliberate effort and the taking of thoughtful pains are required. Beings who are born not only unaware of, but quite indifferent to, the aims and habits of the social group have to be rendered cognizant of them and actively interested. Education, and education alone, spans the gap. . . .
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> But as civilization advances, the gap between the capacities of the young and the concerns of adults widens. Learning by direct sharing in the pursuits of grown-ups becomes increasingly difficult except in the case of the less advanced occupations. Much of what adults do is so remote in space and in meaning that playful imitation is less and less adequate to reproduce its spirit. Ability to share effectively in adult activities thus depends upon a prior training given with this end in view. Intentional agencies—schools—and explicit studies—are devised. The task of teaching certain things is delegated to a special group of persons.
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> Without such formal education, it is not possible to transmit all the resources and achievements of a complex society. It also opens a way to a kind of experience which would not be accessible to the young, if they were left to pick their training in informal association with others, since books and the symbols of knowledge are mastered. (Pp. 3, 7-8.)

One of the things that has happened in our lives is that the balance between informal and formal, the incidental and the intentional, modes of education has been tipped overwhelmingly toward the formal and the intentional: schools are shut out from life. I think the thing to do is to restore that balance, consciously design programs that bring the life of the schools and the life of the working-places and the homes closer together. There are programs that are doing this: for example, in my school our 6th, 7th, and 8th graders spend two full afternoons a week in apprenticeships. Part of our social studies curriculum is concerned with the world of work:

with unionism, with people like Chavez, with questions of sexism, racism and classism.

John Holt, a friend of mine, is really wrong about his "growing without schooling" idea: he is wrong for the above reasons quoted from Dewey. He is wrong for the following reason, a reason again made clear by Dewey: Holt mostly talks about children learning, learning by themselves, in themselves. But this is only a part of what should happen. Children must be socialized, brought into contact with each other and with others, live with others. Socialization means the formation of a certain mental disposition, a way of understanding objects, events, and acts which enables a person to participate effectively in associated activities. Dewey says, "schools require for their full efficiency more opportunity for conjoint activities in which those instructed take part, so that they may acquire a *social sense of their own powers and of the materials and appliances used."* And this is the point where Holt is dead wrong. Schools can help children acquire this social sense: again, my school has multi-graded, open classrooms where kids work with each other, under the direction of a teacher. More than half of our time is spent with helping kids learn about themselves and each other and living together in a supportive way.

Another point needs to be made: I am not sure if students today write any worse than students ten or twenty or thirty years ago. They certainly write better than I when I was in elementary and high school. If they do write worse, there is really no clear reason or cause of the bad writing. Is it that more people, especially more people from minority and workingclass backgrounds are in school and staying in school longer? Are the teachers teaching less well? Are the media corrupting the language? Are kids given too many electives and they choose the easy courses and slide through without learning much? Who knows—for sure?

I think MacLeod and Hollenbach [who charged the media—mostly D.J. shows—with making illiterate jargon the natural speech of the young] are dead wrong in their remedy [more reading of fine writers] for their diagnosed situation. Students learn best, I deduce from several important studies, when they have some say in what happens in their education, in the governing process and in the course selection process. The clearest and best study to support this is the famous "Eight Year Study."

What MacLeod and Hollenbach are calling for is more pouring in, of telling and being told, the very things that have produced sorrowful schools in this country, not an educational system that rivals and instills the democratic principles that should inform our lives. Dewey says that school environments should be "equipped with agencies for doing, with tools and physical materials, to an extent rarely attained." He urged that "methods of instruction and administration be modified to allow and *to secure direct and continuous occupation with things.* Not that the use of language as an educational resource should lessen; but that its use should be more vital and fruitful by *having its normal connection with shared activities."* I'm talking about the process of teaching and learning: kids do not learn to write well by being sat down to read Huxley, Dickens, Conrad, etc.; they learn best when they are writing about things that have meaning to them, that they are involved with, that have connections with their lives. These can include Melville, Hawthorne, etc., but they can also include a lot of lesser writers. (See James Moffet's *A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum,* revised edition.)

Finally, I want to make one more point about schools. Schools are under heavy attack from all sides today, especially from the back-to-basics folks. Schools are beginning to answer back, and one answer is that people have loaded us up with all kinds of monkeys on our backs that get in the way of the real job of the schools (teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic): teenagers were having traffic accidents so we instituted Driver Ed. 101 and 102; teen boys and girls began having more sex experiences so we started Sex Ed 201 and 202. Kids started doing drugs so it's Drug and Health Ed for the students. There is segregation, so we have Racism 101 and 102; and for Sexism we have Sex Role Stereotyping 201 and 202. . .

But why not? Where else can these issues get dealt with? Sixty-five per cent of the kids in my school come from single-parent families; 85-90 per cent of these parents work; most have moved two or three times and have no natural community; they do not live with relatives; they have no religion. Who else but the school can take care of the kids' or society's needs? Surely, institutions take care of much of people's lives (increasingly so), but they do so because they have to. So, schools do not run pure do not just teach kids to read and write and cipher. We—some of us—get tangled up with the messy business of life. Which is just fine . . . it makes the education enterprise worth while.

LEN SOLO

Sudbury, Mass.

FRONTIERS

The Progressive South

IN Gatesville, North Carolina, the county seat of Gates County, there is a cobbler shop operated by Frank Adams, a man who used to be on the staff of the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee. While at Highlander he met some people who were using their stores as educational centers for community education:

> What they were doing naturally in their native communities, I felt could be duplicated as an experiment in education at the grassroots level. So, when my work at Highlander was finished, I learned the cobbler trade, collected the necessary equipment second-hand, and opened the shoe shop/ education center. . . .

The story of what happened—what was accomplished—is told in the July 1977 *Radical Teacher*. The results were in key with what Arthur Morgan said about a blacksmith shop as a place where children learn a great many things, just by hanging around. That and other experiences led Morgan to call the small community the seedbed of society. Scholars call the community which educates *paideia*. Others speak of "incidental" or informal learning. Still others have noted that this sort of education sometimes overflows into a deliberate focus the right kind of school.

The cobbler shop is not a great economic success:

> The shoe shop does not produce enough income to support my family. The economics of the cobbler's trade and the size of our community work against such hopes. It pays its own way and supplements my wife's income as a school teacher. On the other hand, I waste no time writing grant proposals to foundations, guarding what I judge needs to be said educationally for fear of losing tax-exempt status, or mailing pleas for donations.
>
> Further, as an advocate of adult residential education, the shop has limitations. People can carry on extended conversations in it, but the format prevents implementing the powerfully educative opportunities which result when people live together for short periods of time, break bread over the table or make music together. To counter this shortcoming, when discussions on issues seem to warrant, I have arranged to use a regional meeting place for larger, overnight or weekend workshops.

The germinal center of these happenings is a little store:

> The shoe repair shop, called the Awl-Soles Shoe Repair and Leatherworks on the few bits of paper necessary to keep a very small business going, is in the county seat of a rural, quite poor, political subdivision of northeastern North Carolina. So-called progress has been fended off in Gates County. . . . There are no fast-food hamburger drive-ins, no air-conditioned malls, no superhighways. Traffic gets heavy—compared to what we are used to—for a few minutes around nine a.m. and five p.m. Local wits call it the rush minute.
>
> The shop is across the street from the post office, and next door to the weekly newspaper. People come and go all day, stopping usually to exchange greetings or gossip. Just around the corner on Main Street is the county's largest grocery store. There you can buy excellent sharp cheddar cheese, chain saws, New York or California wines, hog jowls, wire screening, seeds and fertilizers, nuts or bolts. The school administration offices, headquarters for the county's largest employer, the county library and courthouse, and welfare offices are in sight of the shoe shop half a block away.

How does the "education" work? The question is perhaps not a good one. The way good things happen is often distorted simply by attempting to describe it. What comes naturally—with a little help from friends—is usually best left unlabeled. But since Mr. Adams went about this work deliberately, others may like to hear in abstract terms why he thinks it is worth doing. So—

> For example, on the most rudimentary level, blacks and whites, men and women, young and old have found the shoe shop a place where they can talk as equals. About 56 per cent of the county's population is black. Old segregationist traditions continue. In this part of North Carolina, blacks are to be seen and not heard, are to work, not think. So to see a black man or woman introduced to a white person, then to watch them shake hands, then talk as equals, is to see Jim Crow wither. For a woman to be

> taken seriously in the discussion of civic issues is to dismantle another rural South taboo. For the young to have a place where they can talk to adults about drugs and sex without fear provides an example of what could be, rather than the continued restraint of what is. These "little" events happen regularly in the shoe shop.

The "method" is simplicity itself:

> There is no daily agenda. Who comes in, and what is on their minds, and what they will talk about, is what is talked about. In this sense, the learning is accidental. Sometimes, I continue fixing shoes while talking with the one or several persons present. At other times, I stop and join them around the checker table. Frequently, I provoke conversation. "Have you heard . ." or "What do you think about . . ." As often I contribute nothing when several people are discussing an issue they have begun talking over. In this sense, too, learning is accidental. But we are all peers; learning takes place horizontally rather than vertically as is the circumstance in a traditional classroom.

How does all this add up? One shouldn't have to "prove" the value of working in this way, but good things have happened. A doctor in the town moved away, and talk in the shop led eventually to establishment of a community-controlled medical clinic. A countywide fish fry helped to raise the funds to get it going. Young mothers lugging their babies around while shopping gave Adams the idea of a day-care center. He talked to one young black mother, and she helped to stir up interest. They have a day-care center now the only one in North Carolina organized completely by the citizens themselves. A conversation between a young black and a local minister finally resulted in an organization that works to reduce the gulf between whites and blacks. The good things keep on happening:

> Five years ago, when my wife and two children moved to the county, there were no means by which blacks and whites could come to know one another save in the traditional dominant-subordinate roles, the old boss-servant shuffle. Today, as a direct result of educational experiences in the shoe shop, there are three such organizations. Indirectly two others have come into being. One is an arts council the other is an investment club formed among the local school administrators. Through all of these, the long-suppressed wisdom and talent of people of both races and sexes are merging. New leaders have emerged.

What may be an important frontier in our society is gaining visibility.