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A NEW-OLD DILEMMA

THERE is something to be said for the bottom-liners. They are the people who, when things are to be added up, insist that you get the right answer. Bottom-line thinking applies to questions for which it is possible to get the objectively "right answer." It is hard-headed and accurate. It has its place in the world. Without it there would be no tall buildings, no great ships and planes, no automobiles and other admired conveniences, to say nothing of all the necessities—and conveniences become necessities—for which we are dependent on the precise bottom-line efficiencies of engineers.

Galileo provided the justifying doctrine for bottom-line thinking in the Western world. Mathematics is the language of nature, he said, and we have to learn it and then make measurements. We shouldn't guess or take practical matters on "faith" the way the learned doctors do. The transfer of this sort of thinking to economic enterprise—which was inevitable—added sanctity to acquisition. One gets rich by following the laws of nature. Being rich, therefore, is a badge of natural virtue. There were those, of course, who felt that trying to make *everybody* rich, or at least comfortable and well fed, was a better sort of virtue, and this led to attempts at bottom-line thinking in revolutionary politics: you find out how the world works, and how society works, and then, using this scientific knowledge, you arrange things and people the way they ought to be. If anyone objects, you eliminate him—or them—since you are an authority on the laws of nature and what you do is for the good of all.

There is obviously some truth in bottom-line thinking; the question is: How much? Well, we need it to get on—or just get along—in the world. Plato understood this, and when the true-believing Delians came to him with their problem—they had followed the advice of the Oracle and doubled the size of their temple to get themselves out of bad trouble, but then things only got worse—Plato gave them opportunity to realize that they didn't know how to do bottom-line thinking. The Oracle had told them to double the size of the temple, but they had doubled all the dimensions, making it eight times as large! The true-believing Delians had goofed. Then, as the story goes, Plato took his visitors to the garden gate of the Academy, on which were inscribed the words: "You cannot enter here unless you know geometry."

In his dialogues Plato attributed a further virtue to bottom-line thinking. It gets you into the habit of thinking precisely in abstract terms. It helps you to understand the modes of accountability. Bottom-line or scientific thinking does not lead to truth, the real truth, but its processes are analogues of the search for truth. All the practical skills are analogues of the search for truth, but *only* analogues, not ends in themselves. People who are made captive in mind by the fascinations of the analogues eventually blind themselves to any higher reality, he said. This is not an argument against bottom-line thinking, but a limitation on its scope and value. It is the proper tool for certain tasks, and no more.

In the economic area, Gandhi seems an ideal critic of bottom-line thinking. He is not opposed to the accumulation of capital and skill in its management. Such capacities, he suggested, are not negligible. But they are not ends in themselves. They are not the basis of an everyday religion or a philosophy of life, which is what they have become in the West. Gandhi said:

> By the non-violent method, we seek not to destroy the capitalist, we seek to destroy capitalism. We invite the capitalist to regard himself as a trustee for those on whom he depends for the making, the

> retention and the increase of his capital. If capital is power, so is work. Either power can be used destructively or creatively. . . . I am inviting those people who consider themselves as owners today to act as trustees, i.e., owners not in their own right, but owners in the right of those whom they have exploited.

Gandhi is talking about bottom-line thinking under the control of a moral ideal. What is wrong with bottom-line thinking when given its head? Well, we know the answer to that. About every thoughtful writer in the country has been explaining it to us for years. Few have come close to the clarity and felicity of the explanation of Charles Reich in *The Greening of America* (we speak of his diagnosis, not his remedy). In an account of the technology-dominated society, he describes its relentless, single-minded pursuit of a single objective—*more production*—to be obtained by "organization, efficiency, growth, progress." Always the economic bottom-line decides. No other value is allowed to get in the way. The bottom-liners explain that if industry and commerce are not allowed to make a generous profit, everything will fall apart. Even the will to live might die, in effect. When the chips are down nothing else counts—not community, not amenity, not beauty—not even life itself, if death (of some, or a great number in war) becomes a cost of economic survival.

What is wrong with this bottom-line thinking? Reich's answer is:

> Only such single-valued mindlessness would cut the last redwoods, pollute the most beautiful beaches, invent devices to injure and destroy plant and human life. To have just one value is to be a machine.

How does this attitude have its effect in the grain of human decision? A story comes to mind. A few years ago the administrators of Cal Tech decided that they wanted to enrich the Institute's Humanities program for future scientists and engineers. They asked around for advice, and among those willing to help were some talented industrial designers. (After all, the graduates of Cal Tech will become designers of a sort.) Needed, the designer-advisers said, is recognition that design has to be guided by some moral ideal. How will a building, a new invention, a shopping center or a plan for mass transport affect people? Will it make them more comfortable but less independent? A designer has to think seriously about the actual good of human beings, they said. Well, the engineers didn't seem to know how they could get *that* into the curriculum. They wouldn't say much, but it became evident that they weren't interested. Not their department, they seemed to think. So the designers went home, wishing they had stayed there. It was as though the engineers had said: "Don't confuse us with morality, our minds are made up by facts. If you can't measure it, don't talk about it or waste our time with your benevolent guesses or hopes. We deal only in bottom-line reality." . . . They didn't seem to care about what bottom-line thinking inevitably leaves out.

This is enough of criticism. The case against the monopoly of bottom-line thinking has been complete for years, and the real problem is: What else can we do? What other kind of thinking is there?

Sir Thomas Browne gave the beginnings of an answer in *Religio Medici:*

> Thus is man the great and true *amphibium,* whose nature is disposed to live not only like other creatures in divers elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds: for though there be but one world to sense, there are two to reason; the one visible, the other invisible.

This *has* to be true, we say to ourselves. But the difficulty is plain enough. We may know in our hearts that the invisible world is real, but we can't put its truths on the blackboard, add them up, and produce a bottom line. When it comes to knowing about the invisible world, everyone must do his own examples in his head. What's the use? the followers of Galileo will say. Even if you happen to get the right answer, how will you know? How will *we* know?

If they are good arguers they will remind you of the Holy Inquisition and other Big Institutions which claimed to have the right answers about the invisible world. Give us something we can measure, the bottom-liners will say. Measurable facts have clout. If you look at the world today, anyone with sense will admit that nothing much can be done to improve it without a lot of clout. This is the Big Battalions theory of progress, still without rival in the present-day management of the world.

The most eminent public challenger of this theory in our time was Mohandas K. Gandhi, who declared that if you can't do it without clout, you can't do it at all. Clout, he said, is self-destructive. Charles Reich agrees. More and more people in the world are agreeing. But the agreement comes from seeing the default and foul-up of clout, not from the inspiration and mandate of a clear alternative. A great many people feel an urgent, covertly expressed longing: How can we make public truth out of what we feel and hope is true about the invisible world?

The fact is that people have been attempting to do just this for thousands of years. The result has always been another orthodox religion—religion made into custom and law. The idea that in the search for truth you are *on your own* is both heroic and scary. Politicians will have nothing to do with it, except in distant formal terms. How can we manage the people for their own good, they ask, if we are unable to manipulate their loyalties through established beliefs? Preachers and priests don't like the idea because it abolishes their profession. Ordinary folk are embarrassed by it because, when it comes to difficult questions of right and wrong, a great many of them prefer to be told what to think or do. They may also be victims of a grave philosophical heresy—that there is safety in numbers when it comes to truth about the invisible world.

Wise men have always said, accept no substitutes. You have to find your own way; only you can work out your salvation. The standard reply to this unpalatable counsel is the persuasive reproach by the Grand Inquisitor to the returned Jesus:

> "Instead of taking men's freedom from them, Thou didst make it greater than ever! Didst thou forget that man prefers peace, and even death, to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil? Nothing is more seductive for man than his freedom of conscience, but nothing is a greater cause of suffering. And behold, instead of giving a firm foundation for setting the conscience of man at rest forever, Thou didst choose all that is exceptional, vague and puzzling. Thou didst choose what was utterly beyond the strength of men, acting as though Thou didst not love them at all—Thou who didst come to give Thy life for them!
>
> ". . . I ask again, are there many like thee? And couldst Thou believe for one moment that men, too, could face such a temptation? Is the nature of men such, that they can reject miracles and at the great moments of their life, the moments of their deepest, most agonizing spiritual difficulties, cling only to the free verdict of the heart?" (Feodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*.)

Those are the odds which confront the challengers of bottom-line thinking in human concerns, and it doesn't matter whether this rejoinder comes from a cleric or a defender of sales promotion or the managers of a welfare state. What they say is essentially the same. Only the bottom line counts.

But bottom-line thinking—which is exclusively this-world thinking—is doing us in. As a result, people are being forced to think about becoming heroes. For us, this means trying to determine how to reform our ways in the everyday world according to the standards of the invisible world—the world of moral or spiritual consciousness—the world with a light sufficient to instruct this world in what it *ought* to do. We said "this world," but the invisible world speaks directly only to individuals, and the knowledge which comes in this way is not transferable. It cannot be made public. There is a reason given for this, a reason variously expressed or translated. The Hebrew prophets declared that unless one's ears are opened, one cannot hear, and

Matthew said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Few, it seemed, had ears. Isaiah had thundered:

> I have shewed thee new things and from this time, even hidden things, and thou didst not know them. . . . Yea, thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time . . . thine ear was not opened.

Today we use other words, but the meaning is the same. A. H. Maslow wrote in one of his papers:

> The meaning of a message clearly depends not alone on its content, but also on the extent to which the personality is able to respond to it. The "higher" meaning is perceptible only to the "higher" person. The taller he is, the more he can see.
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> As Emerson said, "What we are, that only can we see." But we must now add that what we can see tends in turn to make us what it is and what we are. . . . A higher order of persons can understand a higher order of knowledge; but also a higher order of environment tends to lift the level of the person, just as a lower order of environment tends to lower it. They make each other more like each other. These notions are also applicable to the interrelations between persons, and should help us to understand how persons help to form each other.

What is the currency of the transaction Maslow is talking about? Paul would have called it Charity: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." Maslow called it self-actualization and suggested that those who live at that level speak the B-language (B for Being).

Who speaks the B-language best? First, great teachers; second, heroes. What is a hero? Ortega has an answer:

> A hero, I have said, is one who wants to be himself. The root of heroic action may be found, then, in a real act of the will. . . .
>
> The hero anticipates the future and appeals to it. His gestures have a utopian significance. He does not say he is but that he wants to be. . . . As something made to live in a future world, the ideal, when it is drawn back and frozen in the present, does not succeed in satisfying the most trivial functions of existence; and so people laugh. . . . It is a useful laughter: for each hero whom it hits, it crushes a hundred frauds. . . .
>
> The hero's will is not that of his ancestors nor of his society, but his own. This will to be oneself is heroism.
>
> I do not think that there is any more profound originality than this "practical," active originality of the hero. His life is a perpetual resistance to what is habitual and customary. Each movement that he makes has first had to overcome custom and invent a new kind of gesture. Such a life is a perpetual suffering, a constant tearing oneself away from that part of oneself which is given over to habit and is a prisoner of matter. (*Meditations on Quixote.*)

The hero, one could say, learns the B-language by might and main, and literature is filled with inspired translations from it. Yet there seems a sense in which its truths are killed by the attempt at literal recording. Meanwhile, the scholars of our time, especially those with a psychological bent, are increasingly convinced that there is profound truth in ancient legends of the golden age, when the idea of an "invisible world" was not lore from the past, but an everyday reality—when the two worlds were still in intersection.

Was the B-language once less difficult to know? Alan McGlashan says in *The Savage and Beautiful Country:*

> According to man's earliest beliefs, in the beginning, *in illo tempore*, man lived in a timeless world on terms of near-equality with the gods, with whom he freely conversed; he could fly or climb to heaven at will; and he possessed also the power of communication with the lower forms of life, with birds and beasts and even insects. To paraphrase these naive beliefs in contemporary terms, primitive man held that human consciousness instead of being confined to its present narrow range had once extended "upwards" into the spiritual sphere and "downwards" to the animal level. He believed—in company with certain modern philosophers, notably Bergson—that this pristine range of consciousness had been lost, and that man's first aim must be to recover it, if only momentarily. To bring this about he tried in all his essential activities—eating, drinking, hunting, sleeping and waking, copulating, dying—to imitate the actions and attitudes, as known

> to him from oral tradition, of the superior beings from whom he believed himself to have descended. By so doing he tried to lift these particular actions out of the temporal and accidental into the timeless atmosphere in which these beings had lived. That is, he raised as much as he could of his daily life to the level of a sacrament.
>
> Man has never since discovered a better technique. It lies at the root of all religious ritual, and is the basis of certain kinds of mystical experience.

How shall we—can we—know all this? Well, we can and we can't. We can think about it, work at it, but not know it as public truth. The trouble is, the values behind the symbols of this language remain uncertain. They are variables depending on *us*. You can't add things up and reach a generally acceptable bottom-line conclusion, only a personal one. So we have to depend on ourselves, on our own capacity for reading the meanings of experience; by making our own translations we forge the content. It won't be there until we do. There is no other way. The transactions of the invisible world are all of the same character.

This situation is reflected in our own world in one great link we have with the invisible world—in the myth, in the great tale or epic, and in the drama which holds meaning in solution, awaiting the precipitations of which a population or audience is capable. Joseph Wood Krutch has put the matter well in contemporary terms:

> The best as well as the most effective works may sometimes be those in which the author is in pursuit of a truth but the only reason for composing a novel or a play instead of a treatise is that the author is unwilling to reduce to a formula an insight which he can present without violation only through a concrete situation whose implications he can sense but only sense . . . art will continue to exist and to be truer than philosophy just so long as—and no longer than—there are truths which elude formulation into laws.

In other words, Krutch is implying that when *everybody* has worked out these problems, each one individually, then there can be a bottom-line version of what they represent. The matter is paradoxical. We are alone, but we can look for truth together and eventually agree. Meanwhile, there is no formula for the beatific vision or the peak experience.

There is, however, one very rich form of communication—by those who know but know better than to tell. De Santillana speaks of this in *Hamlet's Mill*, giving an account of the time when there was knowledge of "a total order preserving all, of which all were members, gods and men, trees and crystals, and even absurd errant stars, all subject to law and measure."

> This is what Plato knew [he continues], who could still speak the language of archaic myth. He made myth consonant with his thought, as he built the first modern philosophy. . . . the *Timaeus* and, in fact, most Platonic myths, act like a floodlight that throws bright beams upon the whole of "high-mythology." Plato did not *invent* his myths, he used them in the right context—now and again mockingly—without divulging their precise meaning: whoever was entitled to the knowledge of the proper terminology would understand them.

An aside by Dr. McGlashan helps us to understand Plato's caution: "There is, curiously, a certain type of businessman who is shrewdly aware of this universal subconscious nostalgia for a timeless paradise, and of the financial advantage he can extract from it." In ancient times, it was said, the fane was guarded by fierce dragons, merciless and powerful. Today we have the Madison Avenue perverters and exploiters, experts at packaging pseudo-satisfactions for human longing. This, indeed, is the oldest profession in the world, and it has never been so well staffed as in the present. The dragons were a more candid enemy of those who look for truth.

REVIEW
GOOD LEADS TO FOLLOW

LIVES, WORKS, & TRANSFORMATIONS (Capra Press, 1978, $10.95) by Robert Kirsch will serve various purposes, not least of which is (in effect) its explanation to people who live in other parts of the world why numerous readers who live in Southern California have become much more comfortable about the cultural level of their region. Mr. Kirsch writes book reviews for the *Los Angeles Times*—has been doing so for a quarter of a century—and this book is a selection of his work, edited by Linda Rolens. The *Times*, incidentally, has become a much better newspaper than it used to be, and its book editor is one of the reasons.

A reviewer or critic is supposed to tell what a book is about, what the author set out to do, and to give an idea of how well he has done it. If the critic goes on to consider whether it was worth doing, the review becomes a review-essay. Mr. Kirsch does both when moved, plus or minus, by the writer. Two things are immediately impressive—the quantity he turns out and the excellence of it all. He is a literary man in the best sense of the term—the Renaissance sense. He is also an educator. From regular reading of him, one obtains a pretty good idea of what is worth reading, and meanwhile you get quite a lot from the review, even if you don't buy the book. For those who conduct this department in MANAS, reading him is a duty—which has become a pleasure.

The introductory chapter is autobiographical. It should delight John Holt to learn that Kirsch grew up in Coney Island and learned to read from comic strips, before starting school. After that he educated himself, which means he *used* the institutional facilities—the only way to go through school without being spoiled by the experience.

Apparently, he was fated to be a book reviewer. After a stint in the Navy, the importance of which was the time it allowed for reading, his life was aimed:

> When I went back to school, I wanted to know everything. I studied psychology, archeology, economics, political science, took courses everywhere until I had enough units for two bachelor's degrees. I was a generalist before I knew it.

About his profession he says:

> I review paperbacks, pamphlets, works by small presses, anything in print which is available to the reader, even occasionally a best-seller. There are some 82,000 titles published in America each year now. I can review only a few hundred. I prefer to give my space to a deserving book for which it may be the only review.

This is no idle claim. Mr. Kirsch has editorial freedom and uses it. Working on a daily paper is not seriously confining, even has advantages:

> I have not found the deadline altogether an enemy. It is there, immutable, inflexible, gives me closure when I might work forever to get it right. Better than perfection, for me, is balance, a kind of wholeness, something which melds intuition, rational analysis, common sense, compassion, emotional response. I have learned from people like Edmund Wilson and Joseph Wood Krutch and, of course, the greatest journalistic reviewer of them all, George Bernard Shaw.

The resources of one who writes review-essays lie in his network of association. A book or a passage will trigger a recollection that comes in naturally, sometimes enabling a sentence to do the work of a paragraph or more. Kirsch's resources are astonishingly rich and his use of them may turn a mere review into an enlarging insight. Often his opening paragraphs are thumb-nail essays, as in the review of Isaiah Berlin's *Vico and Herder:*

> We can readily see the influence of things on history but it is more difficult to discern the transformation wrought by ideas. On first glance the reverse seems true: the history of science, or of politics, or of economics, invites us to track the major contributors; the survey courses result as neat, patterned, connected.
>
> But is this linear, chonological model convincing for intellectual history enough to explain

its complexity? For ideas have an odd and curious set of lives; they appear to be reborn only to be discovered as reborn: they almost always have Doppelgangers, antitheses which parallel in shadows the predominant views of the age, they seem to disappear or dissipate under the bullying of predominant views, but they never really do.

Then, in a deftly appreciative account of Isaiah Berlin's study, he shows that Vico and Herder seem at last to be coming into their own. They are better understood now than they were in the eighteenth century:

> Vico has been rediscovered by many scientists and humanists seeking common ground between the disciplines. Herder, tarred by nationalist exploitation (almost totally undeserved, another example of manipulation by publicists), is perhaps less known. This study should help. For both men perceived (Herder even more clearly) that reason and imagination, logic and intuition were to each other not distant and antagonistic poles but more like the Yang and Yin, blending into each other to form a whole.

Kirsch's choice of quotations from works considered always seems right—revealing of keynotes. In a review of two books by Edmund Wilson—one of them his masterpiece, *To the Finland Station*—he provides the following:

> He wrote: "There is no classical conception of God that can really be made to fit what we know today, in the middle of the 20th century, of the behavior of what we call 'energy' and the behavior of human beings, and of the relation of these to one another. Yet we still use the word in this indolent sense to cover up our inability to account, in a 'rational' way, for the fact that we exist, that the universe exists, and that everything is as it is."

Wilson was a Renaissance man, surprisingly accomplished in many areas:

> Never seeking specialization, he gradually found the synergism of study. One feels that he wrote fiction, poetry, plays not so much to achieve success as to learn the experience of the creative process, to inform his role as critic.
>
> From his earlier enthusiasms he kept what he considered useful. He could move away from the dogma of Marxism and retain the notion that economics and history could be a context for understanding literature, he could turn from the excesses of literary psychoanalysis without leaving the insight that individual psychology was a root of creativity. . . . Men make systems and unscrupulous disciples borrow the knowledge of the right from them, he says sarcastically in *To the Finland Station*, "knowing . . . that we are right—we may allow ourselves to exaggerate and simplify."

Kirsch seems to look forward to sharing with his readers the best insights he finds in the books which have attention. He writes engagingly, but with educational nuggets for the receptive reader. The review is not merely "about" a book you may want to read: it is valuable in itself.

When the scalpel is called for, he uses it. There is this at the end of a notice of Errol Flynn's autobiography:

> He was unequipped as most of the celluloid heroes are unequipped for this burden of modern fame.
>
> It was empty and he was empty, a hollow man playing hollow roles in a succession of adventure films which offered no satisfaction, no sense of accomplishment. If numbers create these modern idols, numbers destroy them. Everything they do becomes a matter of public interest, morbid or otherwise. Flynn had his share of these experiences . . . . the lack of privacy; adoration which cannot possibly evoke in the admired any sense of worthiness; the punitive legend which pursues those the mass sets up in order to destroy. For the matinee hero, we know unconsciously, is necessarily unreal. The symbol who reflects the urge of a community which wants a hollow hero must inevitably succumb to the corruption of that adulation.
>
> It reminds one of the young men and women who were chosen as human sacrifices to the gods of the Aztecs, raised up, praised, given every comfort, only to be destroyed.

From the present-day philosophical nihilist, Cioran, he extracts:

> Man, he writes, "is the chatterbox of the universe; he speaks in the name of others; his self loves the plural. And anyone who speaks in the name of others is an impostor. Politicians, reformers and all who rely on a collective context are cheats. There is only the artist whose lie is not a total one, for he invents only himself. Outside of surrender to the

> incommunicable, the suspension amid our mute and unconsoled anxieties, life is merely a fracas on an unmapped space, and the universe a geometry of apoplexy."

A harsh, almost screaming passage, yet with truth in it—a truth declared with more warmth and concern by Simone Weil.

Mr. Kirsch concludes his review of Mumford's *Pentagon of Power* by giving its theme: that the time has come for Man to Take Over—to end the rule of mechanization:

> There is evidence that it is happening. And this comes from the nature of man himself. The measure of a human individual cannot be in the absolutism of computers.
>
> It is, after all, only a part of man's life and his cosmos. And that is the point. The machine for all its accomplishments cannot become a divinity without revealing its essential mindlessness.

Kirsch's *Lives, Works, & Transformations* is a work to dip into at frequent intervals. Doing so will almost always lead somewhere worth going.

COMMENTARY
A PATRIOTIC ACT

JOHN SCHAAR is a professor of political theory and Wendell Berry is a poet, essayist, and farmer. Both write about patriotism. Both at times sound like Thoreau. Prof. Schaar says: "There is a whole way of being in the world, captured by the word reverence, which defines life by its debts: one is what one owes." The patriot, he adds, "moves within that mentality."

In *The Long Legged House*, which appeared nearly ten years ago, Berry declared that citizenship begins at home:

> Its meaning comes clearest, it is felt most intensely, in one's own house. The health, coherence, and meaningfulness of one's own household are the measure of the success of government, and not the other away around. . . .
>
> The most meaningful dependence of my house is not on the U.S. government, but on the world, the earth. No matter how sophisticated and complex and powerful our institutions, we are still exactly as dependent on the earth as the earthworms. To cease to know this, and to fail to act upon the knowledge, is to begin to die the death of a broken machine. In default of man's personal cherishing and care, now that his machinery has become so awesomely powerful, the earth must become the victim of his institutions, the violent self-destructive machinery of man-in-the-abstract. And so, conversely, the most meaningful dependence of the earth is not on the U.S. government, but on my household—how I live, how I raise my children, how I care for the land entrusted to me.

Thoreau asked: "Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience?"

Berry writes musingly on the same theme:

> Since there is no government of which the concern or the discipline is primarily the health either of households or of the earth, since it is in the nature of any state to be concerned first of all with its own preservation and only second with the cost, the dependable, clear response to man's moral circumstance is not that of law, but that of conscience. The highest moral behavior is not obedience to law, but obedience to the informed conscience even in spite of the law. The government will be the last to see the moral implications of man's dependence on the earth, and the last to admit that wars can no longer be fought in behalf of some men but only against all men. . . . My aim is to imagine and live out a decent and preserving relationship to the earth.

Wendell Berry's book, *The Unsettling of America*, is the latest expression of what he feels he owes to his country. Writing it was both a conscientious and a patriotic act. A reading of it may lead to many more.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE FIRST PRINCIPLE

OF writing about the problems and issues of education there seems no end. Anyone trying to keep up with this material would have no time for anything else. Yet the task here is to pick out, from all this conscientious and voluminous writing, work that especially deserves attention.

How do you go about an impossible task? Well, in what you come across, you look for communicable and provocative treatment of essentials. And what are the essentials? There is at least one first principle to follow: The best educated persons are always those who wanted to be. So, as Ortega said, the job of the teacher is not to "transmit the cultural heritage," but to do as much as he can to stir the hunger to know. It does not exist spontaneously in the many, but only the few. This is the cross the educator bears, and there is no help for it. It is not only his cross but his work bench, too, and if the prospect does not attract he ought to find something else to do.

Of all the journals dealing with education, the one we often find the most stimulating—most concerned with such questions—is *New Directions in Teaching* (subtitled "A Non-Journal Committed to the Improvement of Undergraduate Teaching"), published by Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403 ($5 for four issues; graduate students, $2.50; single copies $1.50). The Summer 1978 issue is a good example of its value.

The first article, by Peter Spader and Walter Zoecklein, is on "Independent Study and General Education." Independent study, you could say, is in behalf of what we don't know, while general education stands for what the world knows. If one believes in the human race and cares about the future, the priorities will be evident. What we don't know is the main business of education. The rest is necessary, but routine. If "independent study" is not put first, the business is a failure. This sets the issue for these authors:

> The problem is that so few of our undergraduate courses have such critical and creative independence as a prime goal. So much of our curriculum today is either specialized training or popularized introduction that students are forced into becoming narrow specialists or peripatetic dilettantes. Learning to become independently critical and creative is a difficult task and requires effort beyond that called upon in all too many classes. Yet in those specialized classes that do challenge students, independence is not the prime goal, and no matter how useful the specific skills, attitudes, and discrete knowledge students acquire as they pursue their "majors, such training is not enough. It is not enough because people live individual, concrete lives, and they will have to face situations no one can foresee. They must be able to judge, adapt, and sometimes even reject the specific things we have helped them learn.

Ortega found this the heart of the matter. In the first chapter of *Some Lessons in Metaphysics* (Norton, 1969) he makes a lucid comparison between the many and the few. The qualities of the few, he suggests, are important to recognize for the reason that they represent the goal of the teacher for all the others! The few are the ones who know intuitively that they are on their own and who prove equal to what this implies. Ortega says:

> It is enough to compare the approach of a man who is going to study an already-existing science with the approach of a man who feels a real, sincere, and genuine need for it. The former will tend not to question the content of the science, not to criticize it; on the contrary, he will tend to comfort himself by thinking that the content of the science which already exists has a defined value, is pure truth. What he seeks is simply to assimilate it as it already is. On the other hand, the man who is needful of a science, he who feels the profound necessity of truth, will approach this ready-made knowledge with caution, full of suspicion and prejudice, submitting it to criticism, even assuming in advance that what the book says is not true. In short, for the very reason that he needs, with such deep anguish, to know, he will think that this knowledge does not exist, and he will manage to unmake what is presented as already made. It is men like this who are constantly correcting, renewing, recreating science.

How many such "students" will a teacher encounter in a lifetime? There is no statistically significant answer. Yet the reality of such students and what they stand for in the common life should give shape and dimension to all education. Ortega continues:

> But that [what is said above] is not, in the normal sense of the term, what the student's studying means. If the science were not already there, the good student would not feel the need of it, which means that he would not be a student. Therefore, the matter is an external need which is imposed upon him. To put a man in the position of a student is to oblige him to undertake something false, to pretend that he feels a need which he does not feel.

What to do about this—whatever the framework of assumption in institutional education—is the issue Ortega presents to his readers. The teacher must face the situation in these terms, he says, or become, however unconsciously, something of a fraud.

A lot of the material in *New Directions in Teaching* comes to a focus on this question. A closing passage in "Where Have All the Educators Gone?", by G. Lane Van Tassel, is more than obliquely related:

> Certainly the pursuit of truth is not the only purpose for which colleges and universities exist but it does have to remain the ultimate value. The institution may exist but it certainly becomes estranged from its purpose. Neil Sheehan of the *New York Times* spoke recently on our campus of the "corporate loyalty" which many in government have today. He distinguished between loyalty to a man or a position and loyalty to constitutional law and suggested that the latter is frequently subverted. A similar confusion was apparent in the minds of many in the Nixon administration and their Watergate tactics: The 1960's apostles of "law and order," Agnew, Mitchell, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and Nixon themselves are prime examples of individuals having flagrantly violated the law even at the very time campaigns were being waged and programs being defended with traditional law-and-order rhetoric. The spectacle of former Attorney General Mitchell explaining before the Senate Watergate Committee during the summer of 1973 how he considered the re-election of former President Nixon to be the most important priority is a case in point. Bernard L. Barker's tragic admission that he "was there to follow orders, not to think," during the Watergate burglary, needs, perhaps, to be understood in this context. Barker's admission is not simply a moral indictment of a broken man who had denied the dignity of his own conscience, it is also an indictment of an educational process and its people which seems to produce so many who are ready to follow orders, not to think. An analogous situation exists for many educators—ultimate value of the pursuit of truth is given second billing to short-run objectives of prestige, position, status, and money. It is, of course, true that a general habit of respect for authority (power) is essential to a cohesive and viable society. But blind and mindless obedience-to the status quo is the habit of slave societies, not free societies.
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> . . . Where Have All the Educators Gone?

In other words, all those people whose loyalty was to power instead of truth had gone to college. If the higher learning shapes our leaders, what are its teachers doing wrong?

Have our schools and colleges reached a point where they merit Martin Buber's sad conclusion: "It is idle undertaking to call out to a mankind that has grown blind to eternity: 'Look! the eternal values!' "

How does one put "eternal values" into the curriculum without rendering them comfortable and inoffensive?

FRONTIERS

Indications of Human Potentiality

A WISELY articulate man of our time—readers of MANAS during the past several years will recognize his name—is John Schaar, who teaches political philosophy at the Santa Cruz campus of the University of California. In evidence we offer a passage from his discussion of patriotism in the May 1973 *American Review:*

> To be a patriot is to have a patrimony; or, perhaps more accurately, the patriot is one who is grateful for a legacy and recognizes that the legacy makes him a debtor. There is a whole way of being in the world, captured by the word reverence, which defines life by its debts: one is what one owes, what one acknowledges as a rightful debt or obligation. The patriot moves within that mentality.

The world is now in a process of rapid change, and Prof. Schaar's pithy statement seems to capture the sense of the widespread psycho-moral reorientation now going on. This is more than wishful thinking, for what, for example, is the ecology movement but the active expression of a growing sense of obligation to the earth and its countless natural inhabitants?

Various distinguished individuals, as Mr. Schaar shows, have felt this way—to define their lives by their obligations was for them a spontaneous and natural thing—and to those he names we might add Thomas Paine, who said: "My country is the world, and my religion is to do good."

There are other signs of the dawning of an age of responsibility. In the second volume of *Knowledge, Value, and Belief* (edited by Engelhardt and Callahan, published by the Hastings Center in 1977), Hans Jonas explores the foundations of morality in human nature, noting that the idea of responsibility now seems to be moving toward a central place in ethical conceptions. Why should this be? Responsibility has had a back seat for centuries of Western morality. It certainly didn't come naturally to the many who were furiously busy acquiring the goods of this world, proudly "conquering" nature, and grimly pursuing power, on some few occasions with the declared intention of "doing good" after power has been achieved. Today the effects of this almost total neglect of responsibility are becoming well known. As Lynn White, Jr., put it in his notable *Science* (March 10, 1967) article: "With the population explosion, the carcinoma of planless urbanism, the now geological deposits of sewage and garbage, surely no creature other than man has ever managed to foul its nest in such short order."

Therefore, as Prof. Jonas says:

> . . . ethics has to deal now with an unprecedented causal reach into the future. This, together with the sheer magnitude of the effects, moves "responsibility" into the center of ethics, where it has never stood before. And that, in turn, demands an examination of this new arrival on the stage of ethical theory, i.e., an investigation into the nature of responsibility. It should not be surprising that such a task compels the philosopher to probe into the foundations of morals.

Prof. Jonas' paper is a technical examination of the psychology of morals, making it almost unquotable for the general reader, but the questions he raises are basic. Perhaps the most urgent resulting query is: Why do some people feel responsible and live governed almost entirely by this feeling, while others seem to have no sense of obligation at all? Yet the reality of this feeling is given in human experience. Prof Jonas starts out:

> A theory of responsibility, as any ethical theory, must deal both with the rational ground of obligation, that is, the validating principle behind the claim to a binding "ought," and with the psychological ground of its moving the will. . . . This is to say that ethics has an objective side and a subjective side, the one having to do with reason, the other with emotion. . . . the two sides are mutually complementary and both are integral to ethics itself. Without our being, at least by disposition, responsive to the call of duty in terms of feeling, the most cogent demonstration of its right, even when compelling theoretical assent, would be powerless to make it a motivating force. Conversely, without some credentials of its right, our

> de facto responsiveness to appeals of this kind would remain at the mercy of fortuitous predilections (variously preconditioned themselves), and the options made by it would lack justification.

In other words, if we didn't have an elementary feeling of responsibility, deep-rooted in our being, no amount of argument would persuade us to change our ways. And, on the other hand, if we didn't *think* about our obligations, trying to fulfill them as intelligently as we can, we would do wasteful and stupid things—as indeed we do on many occasions.

How does a sense of obligation—the feeling of responsibility—enter more largely into our lives? What makes it grow? Narrative gives the best answer to this. The explanatory abstractions which might be proposed hardly touch on understanding. Take for example Laurens van der Post's novel, *A Bar of Shadow*. This is the story—a very good one—of an English soldier and the Japanese sergeant who ran the prisoner-of-war camp where the Englishman and a number of his countrymen spent most of World War II. The sergeant seemed a brute, and nothing but a brute—demanding, cruel, uncompromising. Yet the Englishman slowly comes to grasp the sources of the sergeant's incredible personal discipline, acquired during his childhood in Japan. He knew, although a peasant, the self-effacing spartan code of the Samurai; he had solemnly sworn total devotion to his Emperor, alone at night on a hillside, when he was seventeen. His apparently merciless treatment of the English prisoners, he afterward explained, was simply what he would have required of Japanese troops. At last the Englishman understood him, and could not withhold a grudging respect for the simple dignity of this "primitive" man. After the war, the English tried and convicted the sergeant as a "war criminal." He was to be hanged, and the Englishman could hardly bear what seemed to him the injustice of the penalty.

The growth of this heavy weight of responsibility in the former prisoner of war is the drama unfolded by the book. At the end he said to himself:

> "It was not as if he had sinned against his own lights; if ever a person had been true to himself and the twilight glimmers in him, it was this terrible little man. He may have done wrong for the right reasons, but how could it be squared by us now doing right in the wrong way? No punishment I could think of could restore the past, could be more futile and more calculated even to give the discredited past a new lease on life than this sort of uncomprehending and uncomprehended vengeance?

It is as the French say: "To understand all is to forgive all." Nature and even human law may exact their penalties, but the task of the human is to understand, and then to act out of the sense of obligation which understanding fosters. This is indeed human fulfillment. We have only to recall the role of the best and greatest of men—of a Jesus, who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," or of a Buddha, who said, "I would not let one cry whom I could save."

If, as John Schaar suggests, "one is what one owes," then it becomes normal developmental function for humans to *assume* such obligations. This may be the central truth now being realized, little by little, through the awakening feeling of responsibility. Such a conclusion would be supported by the testimony of a great psychologist—A. H. Maslow—who was convinced that "we can learn the most by studying our most moral, ethical, or saintly people." He added:

> On the whole I think it fair to say that human history is a record of the ways in which human nature has been sold short. The highest possibilities of human nature have practically always been underrated. Even when "good specimens," the saints and sages and great leaders of history have been available for study, the temptation too often has been to consider them not human but supernaturally endowed.

What if, instead of being "supernatural," they are representative samples of the future development of mankind?