

OUR PROBLEM IS ONE OF ATTITUDE

NEWS of the death-dealing famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea, which broke last November, obtained particular impact from television newsreels showing "children, little more than skeletons, and their mothers numbed by despair." According to the Ethiopian government, the drought has affected 7.7 million people out of a population of 33 millions. According to the *Manchester Guardian* for last Nov. 4, the public response in Britain was immediate. In three days, donations from the people matched their Government's contribution of £5 million, and two transport planes were supplied by the RAF to carry food to stricken areas. Peter Cutler, of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, who visited Ethiopia last summer, estimated that 200,000 lives have already been lost, and that the toll could go to half a million. The United States promised \$45 million in food aid and the EEC Commission agreed to send \$24 million in aid to Ethiopia and other drought-stricken countries. The Soviet Union promised lorries and other transport equipment.

The 1982 harvest in Ethiopia was very poor, also that of the two following years. Meanwhile the country is torn by civil war, engendering distrust between the Ethiopian government in Addis Ababa and the insurgent Eritreans who control 85 per cent of the rebellious areas. A British labor spokesman, Stuart Holland, said:

Thirty times more aid is reaching the Government than is going to the non-government areas. The liberation fronts, which control the key drought areas, are getting only 5 per cent of what is needed to prevent deaths now in areas such as Korem, Kobbo, Dessi and Gonder.

The *Guardian* editorial said that 60,000 tons of food a month, continuing into the present year, are needed "if hundreds of thousands of people are to stay alive." It continues:

Nor is it enough to single out Ethiopia as the only place of need in Africa. The country's disasters are magnified because civil war and famine have coincided, but all the countries of the Sahel have experienced the drought. The UN estimate is that 6.3 million Africans are suffering from its effects today. The Ethiopian famine is only the most conspicuous and certainly the most urgent in terms of numbers, but all round the rim of the Sahara people are dying inconspicuously too.

In the "Letters to the Editor" section a week later (*Guardian* for Nov. 11), the comment of readers seemed especially to the point. A Londoner remarked:

After the second world war, Western interests pushed Eritrea into an unworkable federation with Ethiopia and Western governments have never wavered in their opposition to Eritrean independence. As a result, very little of the aid finally being made available to the victims of the current famine will find its way to Eritrea. Ironically, while transport is the major obstacle to getting food to the hungry in Ethiopia, the Eritreans have independent supply routes along thousands of kilometers of road they have built to bring supplies from Port Sudan into Eritrea. Some British charities have had the courage of their convictions and are supplying aid through the Eritrean Relief Association which has to deliver it to 85 per cent of Eritrea. However, with more than a million people wholly dependent on them, the ERA needs a level of aid which only governments can provide.

The comment of Stuart Holland, MP, is also of interest:

The response of individual farmers to send grain rather than cash has been welcomed by the voluntary agencies. The archbishops' pressure on the Government to make Hercules aircraft available for delivery of grain is both timely and practicable, but the Government is offering only two aircraft, when it could give 20, and that is not enough.

But as you ask, where is the grain going and who will get it? If aid is flown to Addis Ababa it may well be weeks or months before it reaches those in

need. This is not only bureaucracy, or availability of vehicles. It is simple fact that the Ethiopian Government does not control and cannot distribute to the key drought areas unless there is "a safe passage" agreement with the Liberation fronts.

They control up to 85 per cent of Eritrea and Tigre, and nearly half of Wollo. They have made it clear that they will agree to "safe passage" for any vehicles or aircraft with red cross markings. But the Government still calls them bandits and refuses to admit that such areas are outside its control.

The writer of another letter says that practical efforts to give aid should not be allowed to obscure the questions, "Why do such things happen, and How can they be prevented?" He goes on:

That a government like Ethiopia's, whose country is gripped by drought and famine, should sanction the importing of boatloads of whisky and the export of planeloads of fruit and vegetables may seem inexplicable to most of us.

But that is because most of us still have no idea of the way in which the world economy works in favor of the rich and powerful—both between and within nations. Until most of us do understand both the system and the power we have to change it, "disasters" will go on happening, seen or unseen.

That the disasters will go on happening unless we recognize the nature of the system and then change it seems obvious enough. This proposition is far from being dependent on the statement of one writer in the *Manchester Guardian*. To complete the picture, read for example Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, read Lappé and Collins' *Food First* (which describes several horrifying anomalies like the export of fruit and vegetables by Ethiopia in the midst of the famine), and read *The Unsettling of America* by Wendell Berry. Then, being convinced by weight of evidence that, without radical change of some sort the disasters will continue—and not only continue but grow worse—one faces the insistent question, What is the system, or what is any system, and how does it come into being and where does its power come from?

A system, it seems clear, is the form of social organization and interrelationships either adopted or accepted by enough people to give it the authority it exercises over the lives of all. It is the application of a theory of the meaning of human life which may have either a religious or a scientific origin, or some kind of adaptation combining ideas from both these sources. History is largely a record of human efforts to introduce a new system against the resistance of those who prefer to leave things the way they are. The Renaissance and the Reformation are names for such struggles lasting for hundreds of years. Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton were the protagonists of a great change in the human understanding of the way the world is made and operates. Karl Marx in Europe, Edward Bellamy and Henry George in America, were theorists and champions of economic reform or change. In the Orient, the Buddha worked to replace the system of Brahmin orthodoxy; Confucius succeeded in providing a system that governed China for more than two thousand years, and in our own time Gandhi made a heroic attempt to establish a system based upon a living application of ancestral Indian philosophy.

The most recent of the great reformers was E. F. Schumacher, who drew attention to the fatal consequences of the unwieldy *bigness* of the present economic system. Big organizations, he said, "often behave very badly, very immorally, very stupidly and inhumanely, not because the people inside them are any of these things but simply because the organization carries the load of bigness." The rules of the system are such that, when those who live by them carry out their duties faithfully, there come times when terrible anomalies result, as we recognize in the export of food delicacies from a country whose people are suffering from extreme starvation. Why, we ask, don't they just do the right thing? Often the answer is that they feel they *can't* without destroying the interdependent structures of "business as usual." Moral judgments are made on the basis of what we think people as individuals

ought to do, but institutions are not individuals; they are ruled by their charters, which may have been put together by quite moral and conscientious men, but which cannot alter their patterns of action in the same way that human beings do, in response to both moral sympathy and common sense. As Schumacher put it in one of his articles:

Many books have been written about moral individuals in immoral society. As society is composed of individuals, how could a society be more immoral than its members? It becomes immoral if its structure is such that moral individuals cannot act in accordance with their moral impulses. And one method of achieving this dreadful result is by letting organizations become too large. . . . It is when ordinary decent, harmless people do evil things that society gets into the deepest troubles.

Seeing Schumacher's point is surely a first step in understanding the prevailing system of our time, and recognizing the comparative helplessness of those who happen to be the agents of what seem to us unbearably evil things. (There are of course, as Schumacher notes, some evil people who are "capable of doing evil things no matter what may be the size of organizations or, generally, the structure of society," but they are almost always few, and their offenses can be limited or controlled in a small society of people who are aware of such tendencies.)

Since we are trying to assemble fundamental considerations, the definition of a "system" is in order. For this we draw on Mark Davidson's book on the life and thought of Ludwig von Bertalanffy, the father of General Systems Theory. (*Uncommon Sense*, Tarcher, 1983.) Davidson says:

A system, in Bertalanffy's terminology, is any entity maintained by the mutual interaction of its parts, from atom to cosmos, and including such mundane examples as telephone, postal, and rapid transit systems. A Bertalanffian system can be physical like a television set, biological like a cocker spaniel, psychological like a personality, sociological like a labor union, or symbolic like a set of laws. . . .

A system can be composed of smaller systems and can also be a part of a larger system, just as a state or province is composed of smaller jurisdictions and also is part of a nation. Consequently, the same organized entity can be regarded as either a system or a subsystem, depending on the observer's focus of interest. The hierarchical nature of systems is itself a basic pattern or organization, as in such ascending levels of organized complexity, as atom, molecule cell, organ, organism, group, society, world, solar system, galaxy, universe.

The common denominator of the various definitions of system is the idea of interaction.

Our system—which is now a global system—is known as the market economy. It came into being as the result of the industrial revolution, which reduced humans to producers and consumers, and made commodities out of land and labor. As Karl Polanyi put it in one of his papers, "Our Obsolete Market Mentality," saying:

The true scope of such a step can be gauged if we remember that labor is only another name for man, and land for nature. The commodity fiction handed over the fate of man and nature to the play of an automaton running in its own grooves and governed by its own laws. . . .

In this way an "economic sphere" came into existence that was sharply delimited from other institutions of society. Since no human aggregation can survive without a functioning productive apparatus, its embodiment in a distinct and separate sphere had the effect of making the "rest" of society dependent upon that sphere. This autonomous zone, again, was regulated by a mechanism that controlled its functioning. As a result, the market mechanism became determinative for the life of the body social. No wonder that the emergent human aggregation was an "economic" society to a degree previously never even approximated. "Economic motives" reigned supreme in a world of their own, and the individual was made to act on them under pain of being trod under foot by the juggernaut market. Such a forced conversion to a utilitarian outlook fatefully warped Western man's understanding of himself.

Polanyi, as a cultural historian, pointed out that the making of man's economic function all-important was a distortion of his natural being. He has motives other and higher than economic ends. "*Man's economy is, as a rare, submerged*

in his social relations. The change from this to a society which was, on the contrary, submerged in the economic system was an entirely novel development." Speaking of the past, he said:

Markets occur in all kinds of societies, and the figure of the merchant is familiar to many types of civilization. But isolated markets do not link up into an economy. The motive of gain was specific to merchants, as was valor to the knight, piety to the priest, and pride to the craftsman. The notion of making the motive of gain universal never entered the heads of our ancestors. At no time prior to the second quarter of the nineteenth century were markets more than a subordinate feature in society. . . . Thus were established the three tenets of economic liberalism, the principle on which market economy is organized: that labor should find its price on the market, that money should be supplied by a self-adjusting mechanism; that commodities should be free to flow from country to country irrespective of the consequences. . . . A self-inflamatory process was induced, as a result of which the formerly harmless market pattern expanded into a sociological enormity.

Polanyi, apparently, understood the amoral character of the "system" which the writer of the letter to the *Guardian* condemned. He said:

I plead for the restoration of that unity of motives which should inform man in his everyday activities as a producer, for the reabsorption of the economic system in society, for the creative adaptation of our ways of life to an industrial environment. . . .

What appears to our generation as the problem of capitalism is, in reality, the far greater problem of an industrial civilization. The economic liberal is blind to this fact. In defending capitalism as an economic system, he ignores the challenge of the Machine Age. Yet the dangers that make the bravest quake today transcend economy. The idyllic concerns of trust-busting and Taylorization have been superseded by Hiroshima. Scientific barbarism is dogging our footsteps. The Germans were planning a contrivance to make the sun emanate death rays. We, in fact, produced a burst of death rays that blotted out the sun. Yet the Germans had an evil philosophy, and we had a humane philosophy. In this we should learn to see the symbol of our peril. . . . in a truly democratic society, the problem of industry would resolve itself through the planned intervention of the producers and consumers themselves. Such conscious

and responsible action is, indeed, one of the embodiments of freedom in a complex society. But as the contents of this article suggest, such an endeavor cannot be successful unless it is disciplined by a total view of man and society very different from that which we inherited from market economy.

Polanyi wrote this in 1947. We have been quoting from the book, *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies—Essays of Karl Polanyi*, edited by George Dalton and published as a Beacon paperback in 1971. An earlier work, *The Great Transformation* (1944), was a study of the structure of nineteenth-century capitalism and "the enormity of its social consequences." He was a humane scholar who saw the need to emancipate ourselves from the hypnotic control of the market and economic determinism but was thoroughly aware of the difficulties. It is easy enough, he pointed out, to make a shift from one conceptual framework to another in physical science, but to make such a change in social thinking is a vast undertaking. "It is," he said, "like rebuilding a house, foundation, walls, fittings and all, while continuing to live in it."

That the "house" erected according to the supposed laws of the market needs rebuilding there can be no doubt, but then the question arises: What plan shall we use? The Communist model, to most of us, seems even worse, and what remains as a guide? There is a school of thought now slowly emerging among a number of scientists and others who, for some fifty years or more, have been looking to nature for instructions. They are in no sense ideologists; their theories, which are mostly tentative, have for their foundation the simple response to the effects of industrialism: At the very least, *do no harm*. They also have some positive suggestions, and for the clearest of these we go to Aldo Leopold—to the last chapter of his well known book, *A Sand County Almanac*. His point, in "The Land Ethic," is that prudential self-interest is not good enough to save the land, the foundation of all economic life, from being damaged beyond repair. Our educational institutions, he says, are doing little or

nothing to avert future catastrophe. Writing before 1949, he said that while we seem to have more education, we have "less soil, fewer healthy woods, and as many floods as in 1937." Elsewhere in this book he wrote:

One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on the land is quite invisible to laymen. An ecologist must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well and does not want to be told otherwise.

What is the great offender against both land and society? It is the worship of and loyalty to self-interest, in Leopold's view. Needed is fundamental ethical development.

No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis loyalties, affections, and convictions. The proof that conservation has not yet touched these foundations of conduct lies in the fact that philosophy and religion have not yet heard of it. In our attempt to make conservation easy, we have made it trivial. . . . It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to the land can exist without love, respect and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean something far broader than economic value. I mean value in the philosophical sense. . . . The "key-log" which must be moved to release the evolutionary process is simply this: quit thinking about decent land-use as solely an economic problem. Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise. . . . By and large, our present problem is one of attitudes and implements.

If the counsels of the ecologists were expanded in all directions, we would eventually have a restoration of community life—community with one another and community with the earth. We could make famines a thing of the past.

REVIEW

AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

SINCE 1954, when Willis Harman, physicist and electrical engineer at Stanford University, went through a psychological experience which shook him loose from the familiar assumptions of the scientific outlook and method, this educator, and in some sense prophet of what seems to him the next step in human evolution, has been animated by the conviction that the time has come for modern man to begin looking within. Since Galileo Western civilization has been almost wholly preoccupied by the attempt to master the external forces of nature. For a time, the Enlightenment served as a liberating principle in human history, freeing the mind from the shackles of past belief and convincing the world of man's capacity to make his own world as he wishes, using his awakening powers of mind and the skills he rapidly acquired in the manipulation of natural forces, but by the middle years of the twentieth century it became evident that somewhere in the comparatively recent past the course of civilization had gone wrong—we seemed more and more confined in both technological and psychological traps of our own making.

Even our mastery of science was leading to activities that proved uncontrollable, as in the case of nuclear weapons and power. Only another kind of evolutionary development, Harman concluded, could make possible a new beginning more in harmony with the laws of life. After some thirty years of research and reflection, Harman has set down his conception of future human evolution in a book, *Higher Creativity* (Tarcher, 1984, \$8.95 in paperback), with Howard Rheingold as co-author.

The resources within the human being, Harman maintains, are as great or greater than the treasures that have become accessible to us in the natural world. Indeed, he shows that many of the epoch-making scientific discoveries became possible, not from the simple application of

scientific method to physical problems, but as a result of a sudden inspiration by an inner genius, sometimes coming in dream, sometimes in a moment of casual relaxation. There was, of course, hard work and thinking, too, but the solution, when it came, seemed effortless. All that remained was an almost routine confirmation by experiment or mathematical verification, plus a little elaboration. The accounts of such discoveries make one of the most interesting parts of this book. The chapter begins:

Along with the orthodox history of scientific-technological cultural progress we learn about in school, there is another, less well-known account, a hidden history that is not so much suppressed as repressed. The evidence itself is not hidden. Of course, it is easier to find books about Cartesian philosophy or molecular biology or the contribution of sewing machines than it is to find books about Descartes' dreams, or Kekule's snake or Elias Howe's nightmare. But the information is there for anyone who takes the time to seek it out.

In their autobiographies and memoranda, many artists and creative geniuses single out one or more insights as being somehow different from their "normal working day" moments of inspiration. In our culture, we pay attention to the products and artifacts that result from these creative breakthroughs but have ignored the often impassioned pleas of geniuses to look more carefully at those special moments in their own lives when they were more than usually aware.

We interrupt our review here to quote from an article in an early issue of *MANAS* (July 27, 1949) in which it was said:

That the secrets of nature disclose themselves to workers in science in sudden flashes of "intuition" is now so well recognized that for some years the General Electric Company has conducted a "course" for inventors, attempting to apply the "principles" of discovery as described by a number of successful innovators in science. Mr. C. G. Suits, chief of the General Electric research division, has summarized the universal experience by saying, "Hard work invariably precedes the flash of inspiration," but the question of what, exactly, the flash is or where it comes from cannot be generalized upon at all. One engineer "insists that intuition is an awareness of Absolute Truth—a sort of spiritual receiving set that permits the owner to tune in broadcasts of universal

knowledge." A famous designer of airplanes—probably Sikorsky—regards it as "a new sixth sense, enabling its fortunate possessor to see ahead in time, and become aware of future events long before they happen." Another scientist feels the presence of a "guardian angel" who whispers advice and prevents mistakes, while a prominent chemist "gets the impression that unseen hands are guiding his operations." . . . Mr. Suits . . . borrows from a colleague the idea that "hunches" leading to discovery scurry around in the brain like birds in a cage. Occasionally, one of them finds an exit unguarded by preconceived ideas and flutters out into the conscious mind where the inventor can get at it. Mr. Suits, writing in the *American Magazine* for December, 1945, makes good use of the notion that the weight of tradition obstructs original thinking:

"What stifles the creative spark? It could be that our present system of teaching, both at home and in the schoolroom, squashes originality. . . . Instead of being taught to think, children are taught to parrot the great thoughts of the "authorities"—which all too often turn out to be wrong.

"If we want Edisons and Whitmans—and America can use them!—our schools will have to de-emphasize mere memory drills and start teaching intuition."

This seems a partial anticipation of much that Willis Harman has to say, although Harman is looking for sources of an inspiration which has the power to alter the very patterns of both thinking and society. His central point is that the low estimate of both mankind and human nature which has resulted from the amoral relativism of the scientific outlook tends to block our inner development. We need, he says, to *believe* in the higher nature of man in order to bring its potentialities into play in our lives. Called for is a dramatic break with limiting assumptions about ourselves. Toward the end of the book he says:

The sciences of inner perception have long stated that ordinary men and women go through life in a kind of hypnotic sleep. This is the "cultural hypnosis" that results from being programmed by society to perceive the universe around us, in the same way the rest of the culture does. . . . If a person begins to be "dehypnotized," or "enlightened" to a state of increased inner awareness, he or she becomes conscious that certain decisions which formerly might

have seemed to be dictated by logic, were actually reflections of choices made on the higher level of the self that we have been associating with the unconscious and the idea processor, that experiences and relationships necessary for personal growth were selected and sought by that part of self and were by no means accidental or coincidental as they seemed at the time they occurred.

Such a person becomes aware that there is no desire in life as strong as the desire, which previously had been outside conscious awareness and obscured by the clamorous demands of the ego-self, to identify with and follow the guidance of the higher self. Such a person becomes aware that human potential is apparently limitless, and that in some sense, it appears that all knowledge and power is ultimately accessible in the mind looking within itself, and that all limitations are ultimately the consequence of limiting beliefs.

It becomes evident from this book that Mr. Harman has made it his life work to do everything in his power to release the modern mind from the prison of limiting beliefs. We are far better than we thought and know far more than we can tell. He draws on the entirety of the psychological and philosophical traditions of Western civilization, giving the counsels of great religious teachers, mystics, and psychic researchers in an effort to show that the time has come for a great change in how we think of ourselves, as the first step in releasing what may eventually be recognized as immeasurable potentialities. This purpose was made clear in his article, "The New Copernican Revolution," which appeared in *Stanford Today* for the Winter of 1969, in which he said:

To whatever extent the science of the past may have contributed to a mechanistic and economic image of man, the new science of subjective experience may provide a counteracting force toward the ennobling of the image of the individual's possibilities, of the educational and socializing processes, and of the future. And if we have come to understand that science is not a description of "reality" but a metaphorical ordering of experience, the new science does not impugn the old. It is not a question of which view is "true" in some ultimate sense. Rather, it is a matter of which picture is more useful in guiding human affairs. Among the possible images that are reasonably in accord with

accumulated human experience, since the image held is that most likely to come into being, it is prudent to choose the noblest. . . .

At a time when the nation may well be in its gravest peril in over a century, and Western civilization may hang in the balance, it could even come to pass that a new "Copernican revolution" might provide a missing balance in some four-century-old trends started by the first one.

The present book gathers much material to show that such a "revolution" is indeed on the way, drawing strength from diverse sources; and to Harman the idea of man's higher nature and latent capacities is, in Hugo's words, "an idea whose time has come." Whether it is stronger than "all the armies of the world," as Hugo predicted, remains to be seen.

Recognition of man's higher nature would be, in Thomas Kuhn's phrase, a "paradigm shift," with all the consequences that flow from so great a change. Among psychologists, Harman quotes most frequently from A.H. Maslow and Carl Rogers. A brief characterization of Mr. Harman would be that he is a scientific thinker who has retained his sense of discipline while entertaining the possibilities which come to an open mind.

One other thing seems important to say. The exploration of the inner universe may prove to be fully as engrossing and extensive as the outer world with which we are now fairly familiar. And like the world of external nature, it may present hazards of which we now know little or nothing, along with the promise of the immeasurable benefits described by Willis Harman. The author is not unaware of this, remarking in one place: "But creativity and breakthrough insights can be harnessed to destructive as well as constructive ends, as this century's conflicts and genocides demonstrated." There may be sloughs and quicksands in the psychic world that have the power to absorb and destroy the careless or irresponsible investigator or the pursuer of personal power. An ethical philosophy may be the indispensable safeguard for forays in this direction.

COMMENTARY

A DANGEROUS DOCTRINE

THERE is a psychological reality briefly referred to in this week's Review which should have more examination and emphasis. In order to alter our ways, Willis Harman is quoted as saying (see page 3), we need to believe in the higher nature of man. We cannot draw on our higher potentialities unless we think they exist. This seems obvious enough, but in the quotation from his *Stanford Today* article of 1969, the idea seems somewhat qualified by the suggestion that it is a matter of deciding which conception of the self "is more useful in guiding human affairs."

Perhaps "belief" is too weak a word for the quality which gives human beings the feeling of being equal to the tasks ahead. As we consider these questions reflectively, making comparisons and weighing alternatives, we are likely to forget that in the crises which overtake us in the drama of life, we don't have much time to withdraw, reflect, and then make judicious decision. Our destiny is upon us and action is called for. How shall we behave?

Decisions about the self are not really pragmatic. They arise, or ought to arise, from the deepest part of our being. Reason may justify and sanction a heroic conception of the self, but the conviction itself—of a Luther, a Bruno, a Paine, a Lincoln—comes from the inner god rather than from his intellectual tools.

A dangerous doctrine this—one to use or preach very carefully. For going beyond reason is always accompanied by the alternative possibility of going below it. What protection have we against this? The rule of Hippocrates might be best to apply here: At least, *do no harm!*

For persuading ourselves that to meet the emergencies of the hour we shall need a trans-rational sort of courage—a heroic, indeed a Promethean, idea of who and what we are—we have only to go to history and biography. The doers and achievers have always been

Prometheans. They show what is actually possible for human beings. They confirm the promise of what Willis Harman calls the higher nature of man, and they also demonstrate the depth of the conviction required to draw on its resources. In his quiet way, Thoreau was able to do it. And on another scale, one with great historical consequences, so was Gandhi. Gandhi, we might remember, made the Hippocratic rule the law of his life.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

MUSINGS ON POETRY

THE fact that, even now, after many years of not reviewing books of poetry, and occasional explanations of this neglect, MANAS still receives volumes of verse from publishers, suggests a topic for discussion here. What are the right things to say about poetry? How should the subject be approached? Called for, it seems to us, is a particular kind of insight as well as a large amount of knowledge of past literature, with appropriate development of the critical sense. Even a moderate exposure to what seems really useful criticism of poetry ought to be enough to make most people keep still on the subject.

Some remarks by Howard Nemerov (in a collection of essays on contemporary poetry, edited by Robert Boyers and published by Schocken in 1974) are to the point. Writing on "Poetry & Meaning," he said:

Everyone who thinks much about poetry will have observed how in the early years of this century it abruptly became much harder to understand. Not all of it by any means but I need mention only Eliot, Pound, Hart Crane, as instances. By heroic efforts of criticism and exegesis Eliot's poems, which seem to have impressed many of their first readers as being written in Linear B, were made part of the common language, so that even ball games now may end not with a bang but a whimper. The same has not happened to the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound, and I incline to doubt it will happen.

He then says something helpful:

What I am calling the slow collapse of meaning, which made poetry so very hard to understand, and consequently conferred on English Departments a large part of both their real and their spurious importance, evidently did not happen in poetry alone. It happened even more conspicuously and at about the same time in physics, in painting, in music the whole world suddenly became frightfully hard to understand. And there is a corollary to this that I find most interesting: the mind responded magnificently to the challenge of all this difficulty in ever so many ways . . . and from asking concerning the meaning of this poem and that went on to ask concerning meaning itself and in general. Again, I need mention only a few names: Kenneth Burke William Empson, I. A. Richards, all seem to have begun by

inquiring about the meaning of poems and then to have felt themselves irresistibly drawn to the question beyond: what is meaning, and how does it happen to arise? . . .

Another comment:

Students of what is called nowadays The Creative Process do not observably turn into artists. And when the depths of things are exposed to the dry light of reasoned explanation they may well dry up. For it is paradoxical, and therefore, in a round world true, that a great deal of knowledge may come to resemble a great insanity. That may be why I am forced to contend that a vast increase in knowledge was simultaneous with a slow collapse in the idea of meaning. . . . And if the languages of the arts and sciences grow progressively harder to understand, the matching phenomenon on the other side is that in the public language it is getting progressively harder to say anything that refers to reality.

We turn now to another contribution to this book—titled *Contemporary Poetry in America*—by Joyce Carol Oates, devoted to the work of Sylvia Plath. After speaking of the technical virtuosity of her first work, Miss Oates says:

The early successes, predicated upon ruthless self-examination, demand a repeating of their skills even when the original psychological dramas have been outgrown or exhausted, since the lyric poet is instructed to look into his heart and write, and by tradition has only himself to write about. But poetry—like all art—demands that its subject be made sacred. Art is the sacralizing of its subject. The problem, then, is a nearly impossible one: How can the poet make himself sacred? Once he has exposed himself, revealed himself, dramatized his fantasies and terrors, what can he do next? Most of modern poetry is scornful, cynical, contemptuous of its subject (whether self or others), bitter or amused or coldly detached. It shrinks from the activity of making the profane world sacred, because it can approach the world only *through* the self-as-subject, and the prospect of glorifying oneself is an impossible one. . . . Most lyric poets explore themselves endlessly, like patients involved in a permanent psychoanalysis, reporting back for each session determined to discover, to drag out of hiding, the essential problem of their personalities—when perhaps there is no problem *in* their personalities at all, except this insane preoccupation with the self and its moods and doubts, while much of the human universe struggles simply for survival. If the lyric poet believes—as most people do—that the "I" he inhabits is not integrated with the entire stream of life let alone with other human beings, he is doomed to a solipsistic and ironic and self-pitying art in which metaphors for his own predicaments are snatched from newspaper headlines.

In *Standing by Words* (Northpoint Press, 1983), mostly a critical discussion of poetry from Dante to the modern period, Wendell Berry also disparages self-worshipping poetry:

One of the oldest doctrines of specialist-poets is that of the primacy of language and the primacy of poetry. They have virtually made a religion of their art, a religion based not on what they have in common with other people, but on what they *do* that sets them apart. For poets who believe in this way, a poem is not a point of clarification or connection between themselves and the world on the one hand and between themselves and their readers on the other hand, nor is it an adventure into any reality or mystery outside themselves. It is a seeking of self in words, the making of a word-world in which the word-self may be at home. . . .

If both writer and reader assume that the writer's gift makes him or her a person of a radically different kind, then it seems that the relation between writer and reader must be radically reduced. Reading a book becomes merely a diversion. A writer such as Shakespeare is of course distinguished by his language, which is certainly his gift and his love. But his language is, after all, the common tongue, to which his gift is uncommon grace and power; without his commonness we could neither recognize nor value his distinction. . . . Perhaps the time has come to say that there is, in reality no such choice as Yeats's "Perfection of the life, or of the work." The division implied by his proposed choice is not only destructive; it is based upon a shallow understanding of the relation between work and life. The conflicts of life and work, like those of rest and work, would ideally be resolved in balance: *enough* of each. In practice, however, they probably can be resolved (if that is the word) only in tension, in a principled unwillingness to let go of either, or to sacrifice either to the other. But it is a *necessary* tension, the grief in it both inescapable and necessary. One would like, one longs in fact, to be a perfect family man *and* a perfect workman. And one suffers from the inevitable conflicts. But whatever one does, one is not going to be perfect at either, and it is better to suffer the imperfection of both than to gamble the total failure of one against an illusory hope of perfection in the other. The real values of art and life are perhaps best defined and felt in the tension between them.

For conclusion, since Shakespeare has been mentioned, we go to Harold Goddard's *The Meaning of Shakespeare* for his contrast between Shakespeare as dramatist and Shakespeare as poet, since he was supremely skillful in both callings.

Drama is the most democratic of the arts in the sense that a play must have a wide and almost immediate

appeal to a large number of people of ordinary intelligence if it is to have success enough in the theater to permit the author to go on writing plays. The playwright must be nothing if not lucid. . . . If a play's action is not plain and its characters are not easily grasped, it will obviously soon close its run. There is no going back and rereading in the theater.

Poetry, on the contrary, is an aristocratic art. The poet is bound to please himself and the gods rather than the public—to tell the truth regardless of its popularity, to seek the buried treasure of life itself. In that sense he cannot help having a secret, and, even if he would, he cannot share it with the populace. When the moment of inspiration passes, he may not even comprehend it fully himself.

What wonder, if this is so, that, among innumerable playwrights and many poets, there have been so few poet-playwrights. The poet-playwright is a contradiction in terms. Yet a poet-playwright is exactly what the young Shakespeare was.

How, then, did he manage to survive? By, Goddard says, the artful deception of not only his audience, but also the powers-that-be. We sense the poetic truth in his work and continue to go to his plays, but we can hardly tell why. It is as Goddard says:

Oppressors seldom understand humor and never understand poetry. If they did they would not be oppressors. The powerful suppress the protests of the rebel and stifle the cries of the distressed. But even the Nazis did not ban the music of Beethoven. Poetry might be defined as the speech that tyrants do not understand. If there were no other reasons for it, this would be enough to explain the Delphic character of so much of the world's art, including its folklore, its fables and fairy tales.

Goddard's two-volume work (still in paperback print by the University of Chicago Press) is devoted to helping the reader recognize the poetic vision in the plays of Shakespeare. Books like Goddard's and the reflections of the writers we have been quoting are sufficient, we hope, to account for our shyness when it comes to reviewing poetry, although there are other reasons, too.

FRONTIERS

Zeno as Guide

THE most fruitful ideas of the time, when it comes to changes in individual and small community life, are from pioneers who resolved to learn from nature, adapting what they found out to human needs. We have in mind persons like Masanobu Fukuoka, the Japanese agricultural sage, Bill Mollison, who conducted similar experiments on the land in Tasmania, and went on to found the movement known as Permaculture, which has spread around the world, and John Todd, a founder of the New Alchemy Institute, who worked out a complete scheme of subsistence gardening and living on a few sandy acres on Cape Cod, and then undertook the design of a trimaran fishing vessel that uses wind for propulsion instead of gasoline, making it possible for local fisherman in the Atlantic and Pacific to begin to do better than break even or lose on each trip to sea.

Now communities and small cities, according to report, are beginning to think in these terms. In 1983 David Morris wrote *Self-Reliant Cities* (Sierra Club) to draw attention to this encouraging trend, saying: "The signs are there, harbingers of a new way of thinking. From the hills of Seattle to the arid flatlands of Davis, from the industrial city of Hartford to the university town of Madison, cities are beginning to redefine their role in our society." Having found that just "growing like Topsy" leads to insoluble problems, these cities are beginning to attempt intelligent planning. Yet progress is slow. As Morris points out: "Although local self-reliance, recycling, small-scale production, solar energy, and preventive rather than treatment systems may make more sense, we have to confront and transform institutions built in another era, when resources were plentiful, growth was the objective, and affluence was a never-ending spiral."

Today the emergence of a variety of problems is making city administrators ready to consider far-reaching innovations, such as the "circular" water system in place of the "linear" system. The circular system is the method of nature. In *Environment* for last October, John R. Sheaffer, champion and developer of the circular system, calls it "Nature's Way," noting that although vast sums of money are now spent on elaborate sewage treatment plants, experts are still warning that "the country could run out of water by the end of this century." He asks:

How can we spend that much money for clean water and still find our freshwater supplies polluted?

The answer to that question lies in a technological choice made in the early part of this century, when the question of how to save our freshwater supplies from increasing pollution was hotly debated. Two chief strategies emerged: one emulated the circular systems of nature, the other took a linear approach. Proponents of a linear water management system visualized water flowing in a straight line from source to users to receiving streams and on to the sea. They claimed that there was adequate water to serve indefinitely as both a source of supply and to dilute and carry away municipal sewage discharged into streams and other natural bodies of water. When there was too much wastewater or sewage for dilution, the same people felt that technical treatment in the form of limited removal of some components from the wastewater could overcome the problem.

On the other hand, those who proposed a circular system argued the merits of nature's inviolable law of return. By sending the used water back to the natural cleansing systems of soil, plants, air, and sunshine, it could be reclaimed for repeated use. In addition, the wastes could be used as raw materials to produce food, fiber, and energy resources. . . .

The linear hasn't worked well, and some cities are now trying the circular system. Shaeffer has installed a circular system in Hamilton Lakes, a suburb of Chicago, which now attracts visitors from around the world. Shaeffer, one of the authors of the original "Clean Water Act," has also designed a circular water system for Vineland, New Jersey, which, if successful, will

take the waste water of 50,000 people and return it to the soil. In a feature on Sheaffer's achievements in the *Christian Science Monitor* for Nov. 21, 1984, the writer, Alf Siewers, says:

Here's how a circular system works: Water is drawn from natural shallow-aquifer wells replenished by rain and, after use, goes through a series of lakes where it is aerated and treated. Then it is used for irrigation, finally filtering through the ground to recharge the aquifers. There is no apparent discharge of polluted water into river systems, and no need to depend on costly pipe lines. The systems are designed to use storm water and eliminate flooding as well.

Plans are in place, the *Monitor* writer says, to install another circular system at a high-tech center in Colorado. In his *Environment* article, Shaeffter names other areas where the circular system is under consideration. He says:

In the

horrendously expensive, century-long trial of linear systems, marked by glossed-over requirements, unattained goals, and a progressively more serious water crisis, the verdict is failure. The circular approach, which uses wastes as raw materials, must replace the linear approach which seeks to get rid of wastes by discharge into some receiving body of water. . . .

Instead of more legislation, we have to work and hope for a new coalition of leaders who recognize the nation's clear need for the circular solution to its water problems—in other words, for a new establishment to counterbalance the traditional one that continues to destroy our water by misusing it as the carriage for waste. The coalition needs to renew and resolve the turn-of-the-century debate between linear- and circular-system proponents. . . . Because our water resource planning historically was from the top (river basin system and centralized systems) down to local communities and developments, the circular management approach was never a viable option. For it to become a viable alternative, developers and local communities must play a more active role. . . . In solving today's water problems by understanding that they arise from our misplacement of resources, the coalition will be acting on the wisdom expressed in Athens more than 2000 years ago by the philosopher Zeno: "One of life's important challenges is to live in harmony with Nature."

This seems a great improvement over the "conqueror stance of the recent past.