

THE WEIGHT OF ORTHODOXY

THE attempt to track down the meaning of "orthodoxy" produces some curious results. A brief account of the content of the term would be "correct opinion." It does not suggest actual *knowledge*, but an opinion or set of opinions which many or most people regard as knowledge. Often they also regard counter opinions held by small minorities as disturbing, even dangerous. In his study of the function and effect of majority opinions in *Man and People*, Ortega calls them "binding observances," since they prevail without argument in a given population at a given time. He remarks that these opinions, or some of them, exercise a continual control of everyday thought—or what passes for thought—whether or not they are "true" ideas. If they are true, he says, it is not their truth which has influence, but "simply their mechanical pressure on all individuals, their soulless coercion." Of "binding observance" he says in general:

I emphasize the fact that its two most marked characteristics are these: (1) that the binding social observance, whatever be its origin, does not present itself to us as something that depends upon our individual adherence but, on the contrary, is indifferent to our adherence, it *is there*, we are obliged to *reckon with* it and hence it exercises its coercion on us, since the simple fact that we have to reckon with it whether we want to or not is already coercion; (2) contrariwise, at any moment we can resort to it as to an authority, a power to which we can look for support.

Needless to say, both politics and journalism draw on the resources of binding observance as their chief source of capital in influencing public opinion. The technique they employ is known as rhetoric, and criticism of rhetoric, in Western thought, began with Plato. The Sophist practitioner of Rhetoric, Plato pointed out, is both polemical and contentious and uses current opinion and even prejudice to win the endorsement of the multitude. He is, in short, the

manipulator of mass opinion. Rhetoric may be identified, as Cushman says in *Therapeia* (Chapel Hill, 1958), as a form of flattery. Its stock in trade is "the ingrained prejudices, unexamined opinions, and unchallenged commitments of minds largely controlled by clamorous desires rather than by a love of truth."

Yet woven in with the mass of hearsay opinion and popular prejudice are beliefs which may be called "correct opinion," representative of knowledge but not the same as knowledge, since it is quite possible for correct opinions to be swept into the discard by some extreme historical reaction. Take for example the early nineteenth-century respect for the True, the Good, and the Beautiful, partly an inheritance of the best in the Christian religion, partly an expression of the spontaneous intuitions of decent human beings. The value of these ideas was great, but they could hardly survive the ruthless pressure of the rising materialism of the time. In a *Nation* article of nearly fifty years ago (Jan. 9, 1937), Bertrand Russell aptly summarized the great change in opinion:

Throughout the nineteenth century, the True, the Good and the Beautiful preserved their precarious existence in the minds of earnest atheists. But their very earnestness was their undoing, since it made it impossible for them to stop at a halfway house. Pragmatists explained that Truth is what it pays to believe. Historians of morals reduced the Good to a matter of tribal custom. Beauty was abolished by artists in a revolt against the sugary insipidities of a philistine epoch and in a mood of fury in which satisfaction is to be derived only from what hurts. And so the world was swept clear not only of God as a person but of God's essence as an ideal to which man owed an ideal allegiance; while the individual as a result of a crude and uncritical interpretation of sound doctrines, was left without any defense against social pressures.

Writing in 1969 (in *Readings in Humanistic Psychology*, eds., Sutich and Vich), A. H. Maslow extended this account of the influence of the past:

Not only does the whole of official nineteenth-century science and orthodox academic psychology offer [the student] nothing, but also the major motivation theories by which most men live can lead him only to depression and cynicism. The Freudians, at least in their official writings (though not in good therapeutic practice), are still reductionist about all higher human values. The deepest and most real motivations are seen to be dangerous and nasty, while the highest human values and virtues are essentially fake, being not what they seem to be, but camouflaged versions of the "deep, dark, and dirty." Our social scientists are just as disappointing in the main. A total cultural determinism is still the official, orthodox doctrine of many or most of the sociologists and anthropologists. This doctrine not only denies intrinsic higher motivations, but comes perilously close sometimes to denying "human nature" itself. The economists, not only in the West but also in the East, are essentially materialistic. We must say harshly of the "science" of economics that it is the skilled, exact, technological application of a totally false theory of human needs and values, a theory which recognizes only the existence of lower or material needs.

How could young people not be disappointed and disillusioned? What else could be the result of *getting* all the material and animal gratifications and then *not being happy*, as they were led to expect, not only by the theories, but also by the conventional wisdom of parents and teachers, and the insistent gray lies of the advertisers?

While Maslow, in this passage, uses the word "orthodox" in relation to psychology, sociology, and anthropology, and we know what he means, the term comes to us mainly from religious usage, as reference to any encyclopedia will show. Orthodox belief is correct belief, according to denominational teaching. There have been periods of history when the power of orthodoxy was so overwhelming that the normal responses of human sympathy were virtually erased. In the Middle Ages, during the time when the Holy Inquisition was elevated to power by the Roman Church, ordinary bystanders who watched the dragging steps of condemned heretics to the stake,

where they were burned to death, would regard these victims as almost of another species, feeling no pity or compassion. It was necessary, the people had been told, for these wicked individuals to be destroyed, lest they infect others with their erroneous beliefs or do further harm by practice of diabolical arts. Even after the Reformation was accomplished, the burning of heretics continued, as in the case of Servetus, who was condemned for his opinions by John Calvin and made to die slowly, in acute agony, over a slow-burning fire fed with green boughs. Then, in America in the last years of the seventeenth century, in Salem, Mass., the eminent Puritan theologian, Cotton Mather, who believed in witchcraft, had a part in bringing about the prosecution of a number of persons suspected of casting spells. Hundreds were tried on such charges in 1692, and nineteen were hanged, one victim pressed to death. Such was the power of militant orthodoxy. Fortunately, in the following year the governor of the state put an end to the hysteria by ordering the release of all prisoners held on the charge of witchcraft.

These are the excesses of orthodoxy in religion, later duplicated in events such as the Moscow Trials by a political form of orthodoxy, and in milder fashion in the 1950s in this country in the ruin of numerous individuals by the charges of Senator McCarthy.

There is, however, another way of thinking about orthodoxy. In *Persuasion and Healing* (Schocken, 1974) Dr. Jerome D. Frank lays a basis for understanding or defining orthodoxy in a simple account of common psychological requirements

In order to be able to function, everyone must impose an order and regularity on the welter of experience impinging upon him. To do this, he develops out of his personal experiences a set of more or less implicit assumptions about himself and the nature of the world in which he lives, enabling him to predict the behavior of others and the outcome of his own actions. The totality of each person's assumptions may be conveniently termed his "assumptive world."

This is the other side of the subject. Since we have no difficulty in expanding the idea of an "assumptive world" to a social scale, we see that there is a sense in which some sort of orthodoxy is indispensable in social life. A revealing approach to this necessity is given by Laurens van der Post in *The Dark Eye in Africa* (1955). In this discussion he is endeavoring to bring some understanding to a European audience of the epidemic of murders in Kenya by the African Mau-Mau, found so horrifying by civilized people. He begins by generalizing about the impact of the white man's invasion and conquest of Africa:

The black African's sense of security and of oneness with life had been shaken in a most profound way, his access to life's inmost meaning rudely barred. The spell of the European over him was not only breaking but his confidence in the European way of life was so shaken that, in a desperate effort to avert the disaster and annihilation which now seemed to threaten him from within, he turned back to the angry power of his disregarded, discredited and neglected spirits. Only appeasement of these spirits, as he sees it can prevent him from losing his aboriginal soul forever. For no matter how vicious are the forms wherein it expresses itself, or how effective the economic and materialistic trappings wherein it disguises itself, the conflict in Africa is, at heart, a battle about being and non-being, about having a soul of one's own or not having a soul at all.

We have a striking illustration of what I mean in the Mau-Mau activities in Kenya, for what has happened to the Kikuyu in Kenya is what happened to so many other races in Africa. The white man has first discredited the African way of living and dealing with the forces of nature about and within, and then obliged him increasingly to live in a way which rejects the institutions, customs initiation rites by which, for centuries, he has struck a balance with those overwhelming aspects of nature which are incomprehensible to reason and quite beyond conscious control and rational articulation. I do not want to imply that it was necessarily bad that this African way of living was discarded. It was inevitable in the nature of things that sooner or later it would either have to die of itself or else be rejected by the Africans themselves before they could move on to something more complete. But what is deplorable is that having discredited this ancient way of living we have not put an honorable alternative in its place.

Now comes a passage which applies not only to Africans, but to all the societies in the world:

No community can be left indefinitely outside in the night of the human spirit, in the beast-infested jungle which lies beyond the conscious fortifications which civilized culture raises for us in life. If a community cannot get within the protection of those fortifications by fair means, then it will do so by foul.

A revolution is a *tour de force* for the erection of new and better fortifications, tearing down the old ones, which have become both oppressive and ineffective through the erosions of time and abuse of power. At the outset the revolutionists are regarded as invading "beasts" from the jungle outside the old order, but after they are victorious and are able to establish the institutions which embody—or are meant to embody—the revolutionary goals, another orthodoxy with its supporting Establishment emerges, giving structure and power to evils which were not anticipated and are not understood—and *remain* not understood until their effects become almost intolerable. Thus it is said that revolutions always devour their own children and radical thinkers plaintively ask: Why is it that the Left always makes the revolution and the Right always writes the Constitution?

It seem clear that the number of individuals who recognize this apparently endless historical process and alternation is always small. It is part of the character of revolutionary emotion that it is unable to recognize the good in the patterns of life the rebels are determined to change, and part of the character of champions of stability and order to be blind to the flaws in their orthodoxy or establishment that cry out for change. As a result, dialogue between what we now speak of as the Left and the Right becomes virtually impossible. There is only embattled confrontation. How can the Good converse with Evil?

There are always those who see this paradox, know what is necessary to resolve the contradiction, but are unable to make themselves heard in the terms of political language. The

failure of Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke to reach a common conclusion in their impassioned argument is an example of this fundamental difficulty. Those who succeed in finding a balance between the two outlooks do so at the level of a philosophical anthropology, but their answer cannot be expressed in the partisan political vocabulary that will alone affect the decisions of "the masses," and so the angry alternations between orthodoxies of an opposite sort go on and on.

In an essay on this subject (in *Free Speech and Plain Language*, Ayer, 1937), Albert Jay Nock identified the few who understand this problem as members of what he, following the Book of Isaiah, called the Saving Remnant, in which he placed Plato and Marcus Aurelius along with the Hebrew prophet. To structure his analysis, Nock rendered Isaiah into modern English. (The time of Isaiah was after the rule of King Uzziah of Israel, who reigned for fifty-two years (808-756 B.C.), a period of notable prosperity.) Nock relates:

In the year of Uzziah's death, the Lord commissioned the prophet to go out and warn the people of the wrath to come. "Tell them what a worthless lot they are," He said. "Tell them what is wrong, and why, and what is going to happen unless they have a change of heart and straighten up. Don't mince matters. Make it clear that they are positively down to their last chance. Give it to them good and strong, and keep on giving it to them. I suppose perhaps I ought to tell you," He added, "that it won't do any good. The official class and their intelligentsia will turn up their noses at you, and the masses will not even listen. They will all keep on in their own ways until they carry everything down to destruction, and you will probably be lucky if you get out with your life."

Isaiah had been very willing to take on the job; in fact, he had asked for it; but this prospect put a new face on the situation. It raised the obvious question why, if all that were so, if the enterprise were to be a failure from the start, was there any sense in starting it? "Ah," the Lord said, "you do not get the point. There is a Remnant there that you know nothing about. They are obscure, unorganized, inarticulate, each one rubbing along as best he can.

They need to be encouraged and braced up, because when everything has gone completely to the dogs, they are the ones who will come back and build up a new society, and meanwhile your preaching will reassure them and keep them hanging on. Your job is to take care of the Remnant, so be off now and set about it."

Nock has two points to make. The first is the same as the Lord's—that the "masses" will show no interest in the instruction offered by prophets; the other point is that if one does try to influence the masses directly, he will inevitably degrade what he has to teach. Nock observes that today (not only in 1937, when he wrote), reformers with "messages," believing in neither the Lord nor Plato and Marcus Aurelius, are eager to impress them on "the masses." He says of the modern reformer:

His first, last and only thought is of mass-acceptance and mass approval. His great care is to put his doctrine in such shape as will capture the masses' attention and interest. This attitude towards the masses is so exclusive, so devout, that one is reminded of the troglodytic monster describe by Plato, and the assiduous crowd at the entrance to its cave, trying obsequiously to placate it and win its favour, trying to interpret its inarticulate noises, trying to find out what it wants, and eagerly offering it all sorts of things that they think might strike its fancy.

The main trouble with all this is its reaction upon the mission itself. It necessitates an opportunist sophistication of one's doctrine which profoundly alters its character and reduces it to a mere placebo. If, say, you are a preacher, you wish to attract as large a congregation as you can, which means an appeal to the masses, this in turn means adapting the terms of your message to the order of intellect and character that the masses exhibit. If you are an educator say with a college on your hands, you wish to get as many students as possible, and you whittle down your requirements accordingly. If a writer, you aim at getting many readers; if a publisher, many purchasers; if a philosopher, many disciples; if a reformer, many converts; if a musician, many auditors; and so on. But as we see on all sides, in the realization of these several desires the prophetic message is so heavily adulterated with trivialities in every instance that its effect on the masses is merely to harden them in their sins; and meanwhile the Remnant, aware of this adulteration and of the desires

that prompt it, turn their back on the prophet and will have nothing to do with him or his message.

How does all this apply to us? Well, the Americans created a set of "revolutionary" institutions, abolishing those of the Old World—the divine right of kings, hereditary power and aristocratic distinction—and declaring freedom of speech and press and the right to self-government. Added were the right to get rich and the inviolability of private property. This constitutional and natural-law mix worked rather well for about a century, but then the institutions having to do with acquisition grew so large that they were both morally and politically unmanageable—that is, the motives behind them took control of the virtues of the system, and reinterpreted them almost out of existence. Today people who see this ask: How can we let these institutions go, if the only alternative is the "capitalism" of the Omnipotent State? A representative of the West German Green Party, Marieluise Beck-Oberdorf, visiting in America, put the problem with disarming candor. "Everyone," she said, "admires the Green Party too much," going on to say that they are always fighting among themselves.

"We're a very eclectic movement. We have no conclusive ideology. We're anticapitalist and we accept no socialist model. We don't believe in the private ownership of big corporations, but we think that people should have a say in how they work and what they produce."

The coalition of the Green Party, she explained, was "sewed together with a hot needle"—desperate concern about the arms race. "If," she went on, "we had lots of time, 200 to 300 years, we could stick to a grassroots approach and work out our differences. But there isn't time." More of such candor would vastly reduce the intellectual and moral confusion of the modern world.

Where, today, is the Remnant which Nock says will be so hard to locate? We have only one suggestion: Look for them among the Gandhians and the reflective followers of E. F. Schumacher.

And read regularly in Walt Whitman to overcome the tyranny of the very idea of "the masses." Finally, the counsel of a teacher of our time is probably the most important consideration for would-be prophets to take to heart. Herbert Kohl wrote in *On Teaching*:

Young people are no different from adults. When faced with new possibilities they want something old and predictable to hold onto while risking new freedom. Inexperienced teachers often make the mistake of tearing down the traditional attitudes their students have been conditioned to depend upon before the students have had time to develop alternative ways of learning. . . .

REVIEW

LUDWIG VON BERTALANFFY

WHY is General Systems Theory so important, but at the same time so difficult to understand? This question is raised for the reader by a current book, *Uncommon Sense* (Tarcher, 1983, \$15.95), by Mark Davidson, a study of the life and thought of Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972), "father of General Systems Theory." The answer seems to be that while it results in the application of a system to the problems of science and life, it is in itself not a system but a *perspective*—an attitude of mind growing out of what can only be called moral assumptions. What is involved, then, is a stance which, if abstractly defined, has only a vague meaning for us, unhappily intangible, yet very real if considered in terms of its consequences in human decision.

The writing of his book, *Uncommon Sense*, was, then, a formidable task for Mr. Davidson, but after reading it one is likely to feel that the result is eminently worth while. The reason for this appreciation is that, from a human point of view, history is best understood as a slow and painful passage from one perspective to another. If the historian is able to convey to us the fundamental perspective of an age, we feel that we *understand* it. The contrast of perspectives is useful because it helps us to understand one age—some past age—in terms of another age—our own. There is no other way of grasping the character of historical continuity. The pioneers of great changes in perspective are thus the architects of human evolution. Mr. Davidson's book is successful because he enables us to see Bertalanffy as one of those pioneers qualifying him for this honor and respect with numerous illustrations of how his "general systems" perspective was applied in area after area, and to what effect.

There is an irony here. Tangibility diminishes as content increases in importance, and vice versa. Communication concerning ultimate matters must

thus strike a balance between moral vision and concrete examples. Here, again, Mr. Davidson succeeds.

What sort of man, then, let us ask, was Bertalanffy? A passage in the Preface helps with this:

For Bertalanffy, a wrongful act was equally wrong whether perpetrated by a capitalist or a communist, archbishop or atheist, professor or pipe-fitter, friend or foe.

Perhaps one reason so few people advocate a single standard of morality is that it can make the advocate's life quite unrewarding. Those who point out that all emperors are naked are not likely to be invited to join anybody's royal court. Citizens of the world are in constant jeopardy of becoming persons without a country.

As a citizen of the world, Bertalanffy opposed Hitlerism, Stalinism, McCarthyism, jingoism on both sides of the Cold War, and chauvinism in the Third World. As a single standard-bearer in general, he was a scientist who repudiated the arrogance of scientism, a biologist who rejected the heredity-is-everything dogma of biologism, a laboratory researcher who questioned the absolute value of empiricism, an advocate of social planning who championed individualism, and a systems science pioneer who warned that systems science could be used for totalitarianism.

With that much intellectual independence, the wonder is not that Bertalanffy was rather obscure but that he was permitted to leave any mark on the world at all.

He wrote three books on theoretical biology, but his writings on systems theory are spread throughout some two hundred articles and papers in scientific journals and scholarly periodicals. Yet there is no paper, Davidson says, which "integrates his biological, psychological, social, and philosophical thought." What was his career? Born in Vienna in 1901, he got high marks in the *Gymnasium*, where he studied Homer, Plato, Virgil and Ovid in their original languages. He attended the University of Innsbruck and that of Vienna, coming under the influence of the Vienna Circle. This made him a lifelong opponent of logical positivism, which he regarded as

philosophically and intellectually confining. "He held that absolute scientific objectivity is a myth, and that scientists who really have no interest in human values are *de facto* robots." His doctoral thesis was on the psycho-physics of Gustav Fechner; he became a *privatdozent* in the University of Vienna, and later taught biology to medical students. Meanwhile he earned his living by writing. In 1937 he gained a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship, lecturing as well as continuing his studies, and began advocating development of a science for general application of the laws of systems.

What does this mean? Well, Newton's laws apply to physical systems, and in chemistry there are similar basic laws. There are scientific rules which govern biology, and it was in this area that Bertalanffy began his systems thinking. There are many kinds of systems, growing out of contrasting fields of experience, each with major abstractions to characterize the elements or entities in each field. *General* systems theory means the use of the findings of *all* levels of analysis, which may be quite difficult—difficult, that is, to require a chemist to think like a psychologist, or a sociologist to find illumination in geophysics. Since every advance in scientific and philosophical thinking must start somewhere—must have at least a functional foundation from which to take further steps—Bertalanffy began in biology, adopting the position of what he called "organismic biology." By this he meant study of the wonder and complexity of living form.

Orchestrating everything in life, said Bertalanffy, is an organizing force: "The problem of life is that of *organization*." For him, the conventional term for a living entity, *organism*, could not have been more appropriate. In Bertalanffy's organismic view, the visible essence of an organism is not its substance but its form, because form is the expression of organization. Organisms are "charged with form," Bertalanffy wrote in *Modern Theories of Development*, "the way batteries are charged with electricity."

Davidson carefully distinguishes Bertalanffy's outlook from the now popular technical systems

approaches, one of which has called GST (General Systems Theory) "a fairly easy way to deal with the world around us in all its complexities." He regarded GST as barely begun, involving the need to explore "a continent previously missed." He saw the human being as an open system involving "equi-final self-preservation."

Bertalanffy advocated that modern physicians follow the example of Renaissance Swiss physician-chemist Paracelsus (1493-1541), who pioneered in pharmacology but nevertheless emphasized the body's powers of self-healing. Too often, said Bertalanffy, the body's natural healing powers are thwarted by well-intentioned but harmful medical intervention. . . . The meaning of Bertalanffy's phrase "equi-final self-preservation" was epitomized by something Albert Schweitzer said to Norman Cousins when Cousins asked why jungle witch doctors have such a high rate of cures. Dr. Schweitzer chuckled and responded: "You're asking me to reveal a trade secret all of us doctors have known for centuries. The answer is that every patient carries his own doctor in his head, and a good doctor simply gets the mental doctor going."

Bertalanffy was happy to discover anticipation of his ideas, as in the case of Ernst Cassirer and Suzanne Langer, whom he cited in support of his own outlook, saying: "In philosophic discourse, independent development of ideas is what comes nearest to scientific proof."

As a biologist, Bertalanffy saw symbolism as a product of the unique evolution of our brain—specifically, the marked increase in the mass and quality of our forebrain, from which has sprung human consciousness and culture. . . . Bertalanffy said symbolism generated an entirely new form of evolution. The evolution in biology, which occurs on a scale of millions of years, has been superseded in our world by the evolution in history, which occurs on a scale of decades. While societies of insects have remained unchanged for æons human society has evolved through scores of civilizations in the geological instant of roughly five thousand years. Symbols have enabled humans to perform stupendous intellectual feats, by engaging in risk-free trial-and-error experiments in our thoughts. We can test the future before it arrives. "Symbolism," Bertalanffy declared with poetic zeal, "is the divine spark

distinguishing the poorest specimen of true man from the most perfectly adapted animal."

However, he also warned:

Symbolic systems may become more potent than man, their creator. Then symbolic entities—status, religion, party, nation, what-have-you—may govern man and human behavior more strongly than biological reality. This is the basis of the most sublime achievements of man. But it is also the cause of all the follies of human history. Thermonuclear bombs are not only the ultimate weapon but the ultimate of symbolisms run wild in technology and politics.

A paragraph by Davidson provides useful illustration of what Bertalanffy meant by the general systems approach:

A technological systems approach was employed by the U.S. Defense Department for its military campaign in Vietnam. According to a *Fortune* article of January 1967, the systems analysts of the Pentagon deserved congratulations for "the best calculated military supply effort in twentieth-century U.S. history." As Bertalanffy frequently noted during the Vietnam era, a *general* systems approach to the Vietnam situation would have anticipated the ultimate failure of the U.S. military involvement by focusing on such non-military factors as Vietnam history, culture, and nationalism, along with the morale of our fighting men in a war of such political and ethical ambiguity. Moreover, a Bertalanffian GST approach would have included the primary question of whether or not the U.S. should have made a military commitment at all in Vietnam.

The quality of Bertalanffy as man and thinker is attested by those attracted by his work and ideas—the most thoughtful of the present age.

COMMENTARY
"HIGH NOON" NOW READY

THE English version of the pamphlet providing the Hare, yard Commencement address of Carlos Fuentes, Mexican diplomat and novelist, is now available—price for single copies \$1.00 (postpaid). (Discounts on volume orders.) We still await approval from Mr. Fuentes on our Spanish translation, so that pamphlet has not yet been produced.

The title is *High Noon in Latin America*. Both theme and quality are made evident in the following:

Intervention is defined as the actions of the paramount regional power against a smaller state within its so-called sphere of influence. Intervention is defined by its victims. But the difference between the actions of the Soviet Union and the United States in their respective spheres of influence is that the Soviet regime is a tyranny and you are a democracy. Yet more and more, over the past two years, I have heard North Americans in responsible positions speak of not caring whether the United States is loved, but whether it is feared; not whether the rights of others are respected, but whether its own strategic interests are respected. These are inclinations we have come to associate with the brutal diplomacy of the Soviet Union.

But we, the true friends of your great nation in Latin America, we the admirers of your extraordinary achievements in literature, science and the arts and of your democratic institutions, of your Congress and your courts, your universities and publishing houses and your free press—we, your true friends, because we are your friends, will not permit you to conduct yourselves in Latin American affairs as the Soviet Union conducts itself in East European and Central Asian affairs. You are not the Soviet Union. We shall be the custodians of your own true interests by helping you to avoid these mistakes. We have memory on our side. You suffer too much from historical amnesia.

An example of the bite of Mr. Fuentes' prose:

The mistake of spurning Cuba's constant offers to negotiate whatever the United States wants to discuss frustrates the forces in Cuba desiring greater internal flexibility and international independence. Is

Fidel Castro some sort of superior Machiavelli whom no *gringo* negotiator can meet at a bargaining table without being bamboozled? I don't believe it.

This writer speaks to the best in his North American readers.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves COMMUNITY THE GOAL

WHILE a few readers, perhaps, will recall the story of Bill McElwain, which appeared here in "Children" for Nov. 28, 1979, its substance is worth repeating because we have come across a sequel in the *Tilth Newsletter* (Vol. 9, No. 2). In 1972 McElwain, a Harvard man then about 50, was hired as project director of the just created Weston, Mass., Youth Commission. He persuaded the town to buy him a farm where he put young people to work at the minimum wage, raising food. What did they do with the food? They trucked it to the inner city of Boston, where McElwain found that the Roxbury poor were paying more for vegetables than in the affluent town of Weston. Everyone gained from this enterprise. The youngsters earned while they learned to garden, the people in Roxbury enjoyed nourishing produce at fair prices. As a writer in *Horticulture* for May, 1979, put it:

Virtually all his plans, large or small, have these common ingredients: They provide young people with paying jobs that are educational, socially useful, and fun; they operate on a small scale, need little capital, and use readily available resources, preferably neglected ones; and they bring a variety of people together to solve common problems in an enjoyable context. Building community is one of Bill's more crucial goals, and he'll seize any opportunity—planting, harvesting, "sugaring off," a woodcutting workshop, or May Day—to bring folks together for a festive occasion.

He brought the first truckload of vegetables to Mrs. Augusta Bailey, known as "unofficial" first lady of Boston's urban gardening movement and founder of the Roxbury-Dorchester Beautification Program. She welcomed such help in her effort to introduce new foods that would change people's eating habits. This was far more than a token gesture to the inner city's needs. As the *Horticulture* writer put it: "Seventy tons of vegetables are hard to argue with."

Apparently, Bill McElwain later obtained a go-acre spread in Litchfield, New Hampshire, forty miles from Boston, where much the same sort of work goes on. He made the place into a co-op,

called the Nesenkeag Co-op Farm. The *Tilth* writer relates:

Urban gardeners, public housing residents, office workers and college students are among those making the 40-mile weekend excursion to the farm in Litchfield, N.H. A few rural residents, including the full-time assistant managers have also joined this cooperative conspiracy. . . . Experience with an inner city youth farming program in Boston inspired him to marry his land to the needs of city residents. Eventually, the Nesenkeag model, an urban/rural worker owned farm cooperative, was born. Development right purchase programs in several New England states, including New Hampshire, laid the groundwork for the legal structure of the project. These programs have been a boon to small farm protection in the region.

During 1983 the members raised a large diversity of crops—beans, beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, collards, cukes and zukes (!), kale, melons, onions, peppers, raspberries, squash, strawberries, tomatoes, and turnips. There were thirty members by the end of the summer.

Membership entails a commitment to work 20 hours for the co-op and payment of a sliding-scale fee of \$3-\$10. Certain privileges, along with corporation voting rights, accompany membership status. Yet many non-members are also joining in the 4-hour weekend work-days. In return for this work, both members and non-members receive a credit for a full bag of fruit and produce at harvest. And eventually members will own the farm "lock, stock and barrel."

Looking ahead:

Beyond member shares, harvested fruit and vegetables are sold at low retail prices at Boston's public housing tables or at a farm stand. Other outlets are community-based organizations and hospices. Over the next two years, plans call for acreage and membership to double and then quadruple. Surplus cash is projected to be sufficient to begin a building program: a barn, administrative building, greenhouse, living accommodations, and an electric generating station at an old dam site. . . . time-tested Rochdale principles will apply. For more information, write Nesenkeag Co-op Farm, Inc., 650 Boston Post Road, Weston, Mass. 02193.

Other stories in the *Tilth Newsletter* are equally interesting. Members of Tilth are gardeners and farmers who live in the Pacific Northwest, finding community in association with like-minded people. One member declares: "A regenerative society will

not be possible now unless urban and rural America learn to support each other actively and mutually." While there are many regional chapters of Tilth, the headquarters address is 4649 Sunnyside North, Seattle, Wash. 98103. Of the Tilth book, published recently, a reviewer in *Rain* said:

Tilth's masterwork, *The Future Is Abundant*, is being widely reviewed and praised. Subtitled "A Guide to Sustainable Agriculture," its contents reflect the state of the art in the Pacific Northwest in such areas as permaculture design, urban forestry, pest management, nitrogen-fixing plants, horticultural therapy, and much more. In addition to features by more than a dozen notable writers, it contains a Plant Species Index of over 300 useful plants, an access list to seed and nurseries, and references to over 400 books. Focused on one region, this book is really a guide to sustainable agriculture anywhere. [The price is \$11.95 postpaid; \$12.95 in Washington.]

This review makes a natural link with report on the special tenth anniversary issue of *Rain*, which came out late last year. *Rain* is published *six* times a year by Rain Umbrella, Inc., a nonprofit corporation located at 2270 NW Irving, Portland, Oregon 97210. Subscriptions are \$15 a year, with a special rate for low-income people. The paper has a staff of seven, with John Ferrell editor of the anniversary issue. Ferrell tells the story of *Rain's* origins:

In the summer of 1974, Steve Johnson, a Portland-based freelance writer, sent a note to Bob Benson, a well-known local historian and mapmaker. The two friends had recently co-edited the *Chinook Centrex*, a kind of Pacific Northwest people's yellow pages. Now Steve was seeking Bob's ideas for a new project he was undertaking at Portland State University's Environmental Education Center.

"I'm working here, funded to find ways to increase communication among environmentalists," Steve wrote. "One of the major undertakings is to do a monthly newsletter being kind of like *Centrex* and kind of like *Earthwatch* (an Oregon environmental magazine) and kind of like my old *Scribe* (a Portland alternative newspaper) column." The name of the newsletter, Steve noted laconically, would be *Rain*.

Ferrell's story is filled with factual detail from which we take only the highlights. The first issue of *Rain* (24 pages) came out in September, 1974, and was sent to a list of 3,000 people. It was, Ferrell says, "an eclectic catalog of books, magazines, and

organizations falling under such diverse headings as Air, Architecture, Art, Computers, Consciousness, Energy, Games, Land Use, Networks, Recycling, Water, and Whole Systems." There was also a calendar of coming environmental events. The response was immediate, enthusiastic, and probably a bit surprising to the founders. *Rain* was useful to lots of people and they wrote in letters telling why. While the original grant lasted the paper went out free, but eight months later it had to become self-supporting, so subscriptions were charged for. There were bad moments for salaried workers, little money for promotion, yet the number of readers grew—slowly but steadily. One can see why by a look at *Rainbook*, published in 1977, presenting a compilation of the best contributions to early issues, and with new material as well. Through the years there have been staff changes, but with little change in the quality of the paper.

The anniversary issue of *Rain*, made up of nostalgic backward and eager forward looks, is rich in good material. The editors sought and often found the best. See in particular an evaluative discussion of changes in attitude on energy around the country, by Amory and Hunter Lovins. As consultants highly respected in this area, they say some encouraging things, such as noting that lately "we have been approached by some of the largest builders of power stations, acknowledging that nobody wants to buy their product and asking what to make instead." A gem of a text heads one of the other articles:

We learned the difficult lesson that commitment is not a substitute for competence and that quality is not ensured by philosophical correctness.

FRONTIERS Rampant Pollution

FOR about a generation, theorists and reformers and ecologists have been making a case for far-reaching change in human attitudes, pointing to moral principles and the disorder which results from their neglect, and providing an account of emerging symptoms giving indication that the planet itself is beginning to speak to us in tones of outrage. As we know, these warnings have been largely ignored, discredited with spurious arguments, and ridiculed by spokesmen skilled in the partisan use of "facts." Today, however, the voice of Nature is beginning to sound; like the thunder which precedes an oncoming storm. We hear, first, of progressive disasters that are affecting our own lives—acid rain is an example.

What is acid rain? A simple definition: "The burning of fossil fuels by industry and commerce sends excessive amounts of oxides of sulfur and nitrogen into the atmosphere. So what we are really talking about, when we talk about acid rain, is simply air pollution." Contaminants spread by tall smokestacks blow around the country, affecting both soil and water. Particles of metals are made chemically active by acid rain, and some of these particles kill fish and trees. (See *Frontiers* for last Sept. 7 for more detail.)

Other industrialized countries are suffering from this effect. There is this report by Ned Hanauer, a West German writer, in *Not Man Apart* for last November:

Acid rain in Germany, as in North America, results from emissions carried great distances from high industrial smokestacks, particularly from power plants. Whereas industrial pollution formerly afflicted trees near heavy industry, as in the Ruhr valley, trees are now dying in areas known for their "clean air." The whole continent is affected by the problem. Only 51 per cent of the sulfur dioxide affecting Germany originates there.

The effects of acid rain are most dramatic in the *Erzgebirge* (ore mountains) on the East German border with Czechoslovakia. The once lush area is

now totally denuded. More ominous, efforts at reforestation have failed. Rye, potatoes, and other vegetables can no longer be raised and water is undrinkable.

The woods are dying at an alarming rate. A 1980 study showed that 60 per cent of the fir trees in Baden-Wuerttemberg were healthy; two years later only 2 per cent of the trees were healthy. In West Germany, at least eight per cent of its trees are damaged or dead.

Scientists with the Max Planck Institute for Behavioral Physiology warn that 60 species of birds depend on the woods for their habitat;

The impact on wetlands, brooks, rivers, and lakes is already apparent. Marsh frogs are dying in Lower Saxony, trout no longer spawn in the Bavarian woods;

Soil erosion, a result of the death of the woods, could bring floods and avalanches in the Alps;

The survival of hundreds of kinds of plants and animals is dependent upon the woods;

The filtering function of the soil is hampered, thereby endangering the safety of drinking water;

A 1981 study by the Bonn Ministry of Health found that 8 per cent of the arable land is so contaminated that it is unfit for raising food.

A Munich professor of forest botany, Peter Schuett, says that only by cutting back the level of industrial emissions can the toxic effects be reduced. This means lower energy consumption—an approach, he says, that is at odds with "economic thinking and industry." The *Not Man Apart* contributor concludes his article:

Friends of the Earth, Berlin, in cooperation with other environmentalist groups, has circulated a petition calling for immediate legal measures that will reduce or totally prevent sulfur dioxide emissions, promote energy-saving measures regarding electricity, and remove sulfur from oil and its derivatives at the refinery. In addition, the petition calls for an international treaty that would lower sulfur dioxide emissions worldwide.

Carl Amery, president of the E. F. Schumacher Society, says:

"I believe the *Waldsterben* (death of the woods) is a result of our civilization, and we will have to live with it. Our economically oriented society is the real

cause of our polluted environment. Society does not regard someone critically when he pollutes the air or destroys the woods. The only alternative is the creation of a culture based on different ethical priorities.

A brief report in *NMA* says: "In Poland, the predominance of 'national social-economic plans' (i.e., accelerated industrialization) over environmental protection has produced some of the worst water, air, and soil pollution in the world."

This calls for repetition of Lynn White, Jr.'s succinct warning (1968) that "our present consumption of fossil fuels threatens to change the chemistry of the globe's atmosphere as a whole, with consequences which we are only beginning to guess." But the consequences are no longer only guesswork. Nor is the burning of fossil fuels the only cause of pollution. Another article in *Not Man Apart* (by Jeffrey Chester and Angela Gennino) begins:

After years of agriculture's use of lethal chemicals to rid fields of pests and weeds, the state of Hawaii is recognizing signs of chemical saturation in the environment. Pesticides used primarily in pineapple cultivation have turned up in mother's milk, food, drinking water, and wildlife.

Starting in 1979, the Environmental Protection Agency banned one of those long, unpronounceable chemical poisons because it was appearing in the groundwater and wells of Oahu (where Honolulu is located) and also in the islands of Kauai and Maui. The pineapple growers, however, are politically powerful and resisted the ban. One of these chemicals was found to cause sterility. Later it was found that another poison, Heptachlor, was appearing in milk in fifteen times the allowable level "after dairy farmers fed their cattle green chop—feed made from pineapple leaves—that had been sprayed with the chemical." Lactating women, according to one public health researcher, "are exposing newborns to levels many times those considered safe for older children." Game birds on Lanai and Oahu were found to be contaminated and hunters were warned not to eat the meat. An unnamed EPA official told *NMA*

that "Hawaii is the laughing stock of the agency" because "large agribusiness interests greatly influence state policy when it comes to environmental protection." Already hundreds of millions in law suits are pending and it is reported that the state of Hawaii may sue the EPA. Hawaii is no longer a South Sea Island paradise.