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ON "INDIRECT ACTION"

WITHOUT assumptions, there is no thought worth repeating. The assumptions of fruitful thought, moreover, must be ones which are subject to dispute. Ideas with which everyone is able to agree have no dirigibility. They do not lift. Surely, it is evident today that we need lifting ideas. Either thinking can help us, or it is useless. Which is to say, either we have the potential capacity to improve our lives, or our thinking is a waste of time. But we know that thinking, applied to the materials and forces of nature, resulted in science, and then by extension it developed technology, so that we have reason to believe that effective thinking makes possible a measure of fulfillment.

Our scientific achievements, we say, have grown out of the study of nature. That seems to be true. But now, as our best thinkers keep telling us, and as more and more of us can see by simple observation, we are making some serious mistakes. Too many things, that is, are going badly. There are mistakes which study of nature does not help us to recognize and define. A mistake is attempting to do something that cannot be done. It seems clear from our multiple troubles that we have been violating some *order* that we do not understand. One might say that we have been committing these violations elaborately and with a great deal of skill—with the complex techniques developed by science—and that the resulting disorders are on a corresponding scale.

That is our present situation, and we don't know what to do. There are many, of course, who *tell* us what to do, and sometimes the advice seems good. Lacking, however, in these counsels is a sufficient power of persuasion. They tell us about the consequences of what we are doing. There is mercury in the fish we eat. The rain is acid, the air filled with noxious fumes. Our soil is washing into the sea. Our cities, for a large and growing segment of the population, are sinks of filth and wards of disease. We see all this, some more clearly than others, but what we are able to do to correct one abuse or another does not seem to affect the tide now sweeping in the direction of breakdown and failure. And, let us note, the most prosperous and "successful" nations are those which most dangerously threaten one another with war. In short, to be successful in the terms of our goals has been to become a manifest menace to the human race. It may be time, then, to consult some thinking that to past generations was not acceptable.

Fifty years ago Ortega y Gasset wrote a book with generally unacceptable assumptions. In 1932 he published (in this country) *The Revolt of the Masses.* What he said fitted the facts of current history—then and now—but his assumptions were unpalatable. Either they were too demanding in their implications or they seemed what nowadays we call elitist. At any rate, they were far-reaching in meaning. Without support from either metaphysics or theology, he declared:

> Human life, by its very nature, has to be dedicated to something, an enterprise glorious or humble, a destiny illustrious or trivial. We are faced with a condition, strange but inexorable, involved in our very existence. On the one hand, to live is something which each one does of himself and for himself. On the other hand, if that life of mine, which only concerns myself, is not directed by me towards something, it will be disjointed, lacking in tension and in "form." In these years we are witnessing the gigantic spectacle of innumerable human lives wandering about lost in their own labyrinths, through not having anything to which to give themselves. All imperatives, all commands, are in a state of suspension. The situation might seem to be an ideal one, since every existence is left entirely free to do just as it pleases—to look after itself. The same with every nation. Europe has slackened its pressure on the world. But the result has been contrary to what might have been expected. Given

> over to itself, every life has been left empty, with nothing to do. And as it has to be filled with something, it invents frivolities for itself, gives itself to false occupations which impose nothing intimate, sincere. Today it is one thing, tomorrow another, opposite to the first. Life is lost at finding itself all alone. Mere egoism is a labyrinth.

Civilization—which for Ortega means all that is admirable in the common life—is the strenuous achievement of exceptional humans. It does not come about "naturally," but must be deliberately worked toward and attentively sustained. The material apparatus of civilization—its technology—is the fruit of technical and scientific intelligence, and of a great deal of hard and concentrated work by unusual individuals. These are not ordinary men, but men who all their lives pursued a kind of excellence; creating and doing made their careers, rather than enjoying. Such humans define themselves by their lives. Ortega contrasts them with the mass-man who has become the inheritor of civilization—an heir who does not understand either the origin or the nature of what he has been given to enjoy.

This at once makes plain that Ortega has an aristocratic theory of history, but he means by this term an aristocracy of character—neither an hereditary nor a "social" aristocracy. He says:

> . . . it is well known that I uphold a radically aristocratic interpretation of history. Radically, because I have never said that human society *ought* to be aristocratic, but a great deal more than that. What I have said, and still believe with ever-increasing conviction, is that human society is always, whether it will or no, aristocratic by its very essence, to the extreme that it is a society in the measure that it is aristocratic, and ceases to be such when it ceases to be aristocratic.

Ortega's "aristocrat" is one who pursues excellence in his life, not needing either the compulsions of circumstance or the coercions of state. The mass-man is one who exerts himself only when pressed by outside authority or in response to some appetite. When the pressure is removed, as it was by the revolutions of the eighteenth century and the rising technology of the nineteenth, he "feels himself lord of his own existence." He knows little or nothing of the special abilities and dedication that brought into being the civilization he begins to enjoy. Instead, he "believes that civilization is *there* in just the same way as the earth's crust and the forest primeval." In contrast—

> the select man, the excellent man is urged, by interior necessity, to appeal from himself to some standard beyond himself, superior to himself, whose service he freely accepts. Let us recall that at the start we distinguished the excellent man from the common man by saying that the former is the one who makes great demands on himself, and the latter the one who makes no demands on himself, but contents himself with what he is, and is delighted with himself. Contrary to what is usually thought, it is the man of excellence, and not the common man who lives in essential servitude. Life has no savour for him unless he makes it consist in service to something transcendental. Hence he does not look upon the necessity of serving as an oppression. When, by chance, such necessity is lacking, he grows restless and invents some new standard, more difficult, more exigent with which to coerce himself. This is life lived as a discipline—the noble life. Nobility is defined by the demands it makes on us—by obligations, not by rights. . . .
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> It is annoying to see the degeneration suffered in ordinary speech by a word so inspiring as "nobility." For, by coming to mean for many people hereditary "noble blood," it is changed into something similar to common rights, into a static, passive quality which is received and transmitted like something inert. . . .
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> For me, then, nobility is synonymous with a life of efforts, ever set on excelling oneself, in passing beyond what one is to what one sets up as a duty and an obligation. In this way the noble life stands opposed to the common or inert life, which reclines statically upon itself, condemned to perpetual immobility, unless an external force compels it to come out of itself. Hence we apply the term mass to this kind of man—not so much because of his multitude as because of his inertia. . . . The simple process of preserving our present civilization is supremely complex, and demands incalculably subtle powers. Ill-fitted to direct it is this average man who has learned to use much of the machinery of civilization, but who is characterized by root-ignorance of the very principles of that civilization.

Men of excellence are the authors of civilization. Their standard is the rule of obligation, their inspiration the scope of their vision. Their social object is to replace force with discussion by the rule of reason. They establish the indirect authority of attitude. "Civilization is, before all, the will to live in common." This was the dream of the nineteenth century, given the freedom and equality announced by the epoch of Revolution. Ortega puts it into words:

> The political doctrine which has represented the loftiest endeavor towards common life is liberal democracy. It carries to the extreme the determination to have consideration for one's neighbor and is the prototype of "indirect action." Liberal is that principle of political rights, according to which the public authority, in spite of being all-powerful, limits itself and attempts, even at its own expense, to leave room in the State over which it rules for those who neither think nor feel as it does, that is to say, as do the stronger, the majority. Liberalism—it is well to recall this today—is the supreme form of generosity; it is the right which the majority concedes to minorities and hence it is the noblest cry that has ever resounded in this planet. It announces the determination to share existence with the enemy; more than that, with an enemy which is weak. It was incredible that the human species should have arrived at so noble an attitude, so paradoxical, so refined, so acrobatic, so anti-natural. Hence it is not to be wondered at that this same humanity should soon appear anxious to get rid of it. It is a discipline too difficult and complex to take root on earth.
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> Share our existence with the enemy! Govern with the opposition! Is not such a form of tenderness beginning to seem incomprehensible? Nothing indicates more clearly the characteristics of the day than the fact that there are so few countries where an opposition exists. In almost all, a homogeneous mass weighs on public authority and crushes down, annihilating every opposing group. The mass—who would credit it as one sees its compact, multitudinous appearance?—does not wish to share life with those who are not of it. It has a deadly hatred of all that is not itself.

International discussion today is not the activity of reasoning men intent on reconciliation, but a series of "maneuvers," and is so reported in the press. Self-interest is the iron law of nations, and any statesman who allowed some civilized "generosity" to enter into his relations with the statesmen of other nations would be scornfully driven from office by his constituents. The braggart confidence of the mass-man lies in his command of technology, that modern miracle we can no longer control. We talk of control, but this is mainly pretense, even as the strategy of nuclear defense is admitted to be the ambiguous science of bluff. Ortega muses:

> The rebellion of the masses may, in fact, be the transition to some new, unexampled organization of humanity, but it may also be a catastrophe of human destiny. There is no reason to deny the reality of progress, but there is to correct the notion that believes this progress secure. . . . All the increased material possibilities which life has experienced run the risk of being annulled when they are faced with the staggering problem that has come upon the destiny of Europe, and which I once more formulate: the direction of society has been taken over by a type of man who is not interested in the principles of civilization. Not of this or that civilization but—from what we can judge today—of any civilization. Of course, he is interested in anesthetics, motorcars, and a few other things. But this fact merely confirms his fundamental lack of interest in civilization. For those things are merely its products, and the fervor with which he greets them only brings into stronger relief his indifference to the principles from which they spring. . . .
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> Spengler believes that "technicians" can go on living when interest in the principles underlying cultures are dead. I cannot bring myself to believe any such thing. Technicians and science are consubstantial, and science no longer exists when it ceases to interest for itself alone, and it cannot so interest unless men continue to feel enthusiasm for the general principles of culture.

Even the scientific specialists, Ortega notes—"doctors, engineers, etc."—are, he says, "in the habit of exercising their profession in a state of mind identical in all essentials to that of the man who is content to use his motor car or buy his tube of aspirin—without the slightest intimate solidarity with the future of science, or civilization." In short, we have technique, but no

grasp of its origin. In his last chapter Ortega states his diagnostic assumption:

> This is the question: Europe has been left without a moral code. It is not that the mass-man has thrown over an antiquated one in exchange for a new one, but that at the center of his scheme of life there is precisely the aspiration to live without conforming to any moral mode. . . . How has it been possible to believe in the amorality of life? Doubtless, because all modern culture and civilization tend to that conviction. Europe is now reaping the painful results of her spiritual conduct. She has adopted blindly a culture which is magnificent, but has no roots.

To complete Ortega's analysis, we need his prescription:

> The day when a genuine philosophy once more holds sway in Europe—it is the one thing that can save her—that day she will once again realize that man, whether he likes it or no, is a being forced by his nature to seek some higher authority. . . . When the mass acts on its own, it does so only in one way, for it has no other: it lynches. It is not altogether by chance that lynch law comes from America, for America is, in a fashion, the paradise of the masses. And it will cause less surprise, nowadays, when the masses triumph, that violence should triumph, and be made the one *ratio,* the one doctrine. . . .
>
> But though it is not impossible that the prestige of violence as a cynically established rule has entered on its decline, we shall still continue under its rule, though in another form. I refer to the gravest danger now threatening European civilization. Like all other dangers that threaten it, this one is born of civilization itself. More than that, it constitutes one of its glories: it is the State as we know it today. . . . This is the gravest danger that threatens today: State intervention; the absorption of all spontaneous social effort by the State, that is to say, of spontaneous historical action. . . . The result of this tendency will be fatal. Spontaneous social action will be broken up over and over again by State intervention; no new seed will be able to fructify. Society will have to live *for* the State, man *for* the governmental machine. And as, after all, it is only a machine whose existence and maintenance depend on the vital supports around it, the State, after sucking out the very marrow of society, will be left bloodless, a skeleton, dead with that rusty death of machinery, more gruesome than the death of a living organism.

How much accurate prophecy do we require of a writer in order to take him seriously? Ortega put this book together fifty years ago, and there would be virtually nothing of importance for him to retract, were he alive today. What has he said in it?

That civilization is the creation of civilized humans, a creative minority; that these are people who live by their sense of obligation, who make demands of themselves, not of others. They reject violence, are dedicated to the use of reason, and for guidance look to an impersonal authority higher than themselves in philosophy. What of his differentiation of mankind into the noble and the mass? Well, as he says, this is not his work but a fact of life. He but calls attention to it. It is an idea that would probably be voted down, today, because of its hierarchical implications. It is not a characteristic of the mass-man to be willing to make demands upon himself. He prefers to make demands of the State, of Science, of Technology—for him the logical, effortless course.

One more point of clarification is necessary. Ortega gives no clue as to what produces excellence-loving humans. They may occur anywhere, as likely among the working classes as in some other milieu. His man of nobility, of excellence, defines himself by what he is and does. This is not aristocratic theory as we understand it, but a reformed doctrine about a reality in nature and human life.

What was his counsel for the cultural rebirth of Spain early in his career? It had little or nothing to do with politics. There was not a breath of coercion in his recommendations. Improve yourself, he said. Pursue excellence in what you choose to do, and then go out into society, into the community, and live as exemplary a life as you can, helping to form exemplary social structures. Actually, his advice was similar to that of Pythagoras to his disciple, after they had completed his arduous course of instruction. Those able to recognize excellence—and they may

be more numerous than we suppose—will be converted by its evident practice and will begin to join in.

One might also say that Ortega recognizes that unblemished men of excellence are rare indeed. He generalizes types, not actual humans. There is something of the mass-man in us all—in the unattended or unexamined portion of our nature. And there is also potential excellence in us all, which we have more opportunity to develop than is commonly admitted. Today, in keeping with the characteristic and most evident needs of the time, there are those who are pursuing excellence in quite practical ways. They are not doing it for money—you can't reach excellence that way—but from a deep sense of obligation. They are not doing it from vanity or egoism—the rewards in these terms are petty and transient. They are becoming leaders, but without banners and crusades. They are well defined by John Holt:

> Leaders are not what many people think—people with huge crowds following them. Leaders are people who go their own way without caring, or even looking to see whether *anyone* is following them. "Leadership qualities" are not the qualities that enable people to attract followers but those that enable them to do without them. They include at the very least, courage, endurance, patience, humor, flexibility, resourcefulness, determination, a keen sense of reality, and the ability to keep a cool and clear head even when things are going badly.

This will do as a definition of human excellence, until a better one comes along, for which we may wait a long time.

REVIEW
WESTERN INSIGHT, CHINESE WISDOM

IN his introduction to a recent Pendle Hill pamphlet, *Two Moral Essays,* by Simone Weil, the editor, Ronald Hathaway (of Temple University), says:

> Harassed by more shallow novelties, modern students of moral theory have weighed the meaning of Simone Weil's moral thinking poorly. So little do we value a liberated moral judgment that the very idea of such a thing strikes us as preposterous. We think that our only options are either total, facile scepticism or blind loyalty to family, nation, or religion. In our hearts we know that these are both fraudulent substitutes for moral judgment. Both decay swiftly in visceral fanaticism. Yes, it is arguable that substantive, positive morality rests on a foundation of faith. The sciences will never deliver us a morality. So the question becomes: what is the nature of the faith in question and what are its logical consequences?

These two essays by Simone Weil (which first appeared in 1962 in *Selected Essays* edited by Richard Rees, Oxford University Press) are wholly deserving of the importance given them by Mr. Hathaway. There is a sense in which they represent a watershed in thinking about the nature of man. They could be called (along with her other writings) a natural or even spontaneous development of her own intuition of what it means to be human. Purity in its full meaning applies to her writing. The editor says that "her moral thought is not that of an intellectual," and this seems true enough, for her work has a high clarity of which only the undiluted *nous* is capable. Her thought is its own authority. While earlier writers have made the fundamental point of her essays—Mazzini, for one, who gave responsibility priority over rights in human relations—with Simone Weil this idea is woven into an outlook involving full expression of the human mind.

Her second essay, "Human Personality," recalls some of Paul Valéry's perceptive reflections (in his essay on da Vinci), yet she develops the subject in a way that the poet may not have been capable of. An essential nobility of thought, founded on the conception of the impersonal spiritual identity of every human, is the foundation of all that Simone Weil says. She establishes this foundation in one mode at the beginning of *The Need for Roots*. In "Human Personality" there is another approach:

> At the bottom of the heart of every human being, from earliest infancy until the tomb, there is something that goes on indomitably expecting, in the teeth of all experience of crimes committed, suffered, and witnessed, that good and not evil will be done to him. It is this above all that is sacred in every human being.
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> The good is the only source of the sacred. There is nothing sacred except the good and what pertains to it.
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> This profound and childlike and unchanging expectation of good in the heart is not what is involved when we agitate for our rights. The motive which prompts a little boy to watch jealously to see if his brother has a slightly larger piece of cake arises from a much more superficial level of the soul. The word justice means two very different things according to whether it refers to the one or the other level. It is only the former one that matters. . . .
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> When science, art, literature, and philosophy are simply the manifestation of personality they are on a level where glorious and dazzling achievements are possible, which can make a man's name live for thousands of years. But above this level, far above, separated by an abyss, is the level where the highest things are achieved. These things are essentially anonymous.
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> Truth and beauty dwell on this level of the impersonal and the anonymous. This is the realm of the sacred, on the other level, nothing is sacred, except in the sense that we might say this of a touch of color in a picture if it represented the Eucharist.
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> What is sacred in science is truth; what is sacred in art is beauty. Truth and beauty are impersonal. All this is too obvious.

Simone Weil's thinking is founded on a metaphysic of two worlds, one, the world of time and space where we live—a world of mixed qualities and endless relativities. The other is the world of the good, the true, and the beautiful to which the longing of the human heart corresponds. It is the ideal "city" of which Plato

speaks at the end of the ninth book of the *Republic*. "That reality," Simone Weil says, "is the unique source of all the good that can exist in this world: that is to say, all beauty, all truth, all justice, legitimacy, all order and all human behaviour that is mindful of obligations." She also says: "Those minds whose attention and love are turned towards that reality are the sole intermediary through which good can descend from there and come among men."

Alfred North Whitehead has an essay on "Immortality" in which he suggests these two worlds in other terms—the world of fact and the world of value. Humans are fulfilled by uniting in themselves the two worlds. As he puts it:

> When we enjoy fact as the realization of specific value, or possibility as an impulse toward realization, we are then stressing the ultimate character of the Universe. This ultimate character has two sides—one side is the mortal world of transitory fact acquiring the immortality of realized value; and the other side is the timeless world of mere possibility acquiring temporal realization. The bridge between the two is the "idea" with its two sides. The World of Fact would dissolve into the nothingness of confusion apart from its modes of unity derived from its preservation of dominant characters of value.

This duality is developed by Simone Weil in her first essay, "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligations":

> It is impossible to feel equal respect for things that are in fact unequal unless the respect is given to something that is identical in all of them. Men are unequal in all their relations with the things of this world, without exception. The only thing that is identical in all men is the presence of a link with the reality outside the world.
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> All human beings are absolutely identical in so far as they can be thought of as consisting of a centre, which is an unquenchable desire for good, surrounded by an accretion of psychical and bodily matter.
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> Only by really directing the attention beyond the world can there be real contact with this central and essential fact of human nature. Only an attention thus directed possesses the faculty, always identical in all cases, of irradiating with light any human being whatever. . . .
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> The one possibility of indirect expression of respect for the human being is offered by men's needs, the needs of the soul and of the body, in this world.
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> It is based upon the connection in human nature between the desire for good, which is the essence of man, and his sensibility. There is never any justification for doubting the existence in any man of this connection. . . .
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> Every man who has once touched the level of the impersonal is charged with a responsibility towards all human beings: to safeguard, not their persons, but whatever frail potentialities are hidden within them for passing over to the impersonal.

These essays ought not to be cut up by quotation, since Simone Weil's extraordinary web of consistency is lost in this way, yet an inadequate sample may be better than nothing. The pamphlet containing the two essays is $1.50 from Pendle Hill Publications, Wallingford, Pa. 19086. Pendle Hill also published Simone Weil's *The Iliad, or The Poem of Force,* as a pamphlet—very much worth having.

The Grand Titration (University of Toronto Press, 1979) is an imaginative chemist's title for Joseph Needham's collection of essays on the practice of science in ancient China—companion to his larger work, *Science and Civilization in China.* The West, he shows, was "profoundly affected not only in its technical processes but in its very social structure and changes by discoveries and inventions emanating from China and East Asia." He goes on, setting the question examined in his book:

> Not only the three which Lord Bacon listed (printing, gunpowder and the magnetic compass) but a hundred others—mechanical clockwork, the casting of iron, stirrups and efficient horse harness, the Cardan suspension and the Pascal triangle, segmental-arch bridges and pound-locks on canals, the stern-post rudder, fore-and-aft sailing, quantitative cartography—all had their effects, sometimes earthshaking effects, upon a Europe more socially unstable.
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> Why, then, did modern science (with all that modern science implied in terms of political dominance) develop only in the Western world?

Answering this question can only be in terms of some educated guesswork. For the general reader the value of these essays is in the growing appreciation of Chinese culture that results. China had a kind of wisdom—an "organic" outlook toward life and nature, as Needham put it—which has been largely lacking in the West. The book is full of illustrations of what this means. The following, for example, is by Wang Pi, who in the third century A.D. wrote in a commentary on the *I Ching:*

> The general meaning of the Tao of *kuan* is that one should not govern by means of government and legal pressure, but by looking forth one should exert one's influence (by example), so as to change all things. Spiritual rule is without form and invisible. We do not see Heaven command the four seasons, and yet they do not swerve from their course. So also we do not see the sage ordering people about, and yet they obey and spontaneously serve him.

In a concluding passage on the Laws of Nature, Needham says:

> The Chinese world-view depended upon a totally different line of thought. (Different from the theory, experiment, and mathematical reasoning of Western science.) The harmonious cooperation of all beings arose, not from the orders of a superior authority external to themselves, but from the fact that they were all parts in a hierarchy of wholes forming a cosmic pattern, and what they obeyed were the internal dictates of their own natures. Modern science and the philosophy of organism, with its integrative levels, has come back to this wisdom, fortified by our new understanding of cosmic, biological, and social evolution; though who shall say that the Newtonian phase was not an essential one.

If Chinese science had "taken off" the way western science did, "all we can say," Needham concludes, "of that science of Nature which then would have been developed is that it would have been profoundly organic and nonmechanical."

COMMENTARY
"WHERE DOES YOUR WATER COME FROM?"

WHILE, in general, Steve Johnson is right in saying that we're not taught in school where our water comes from, or where it goes as waste (see page 7), there is actually a fine text on not only water sources and management, but also on transportation and energy. Back in the 70s, Ed Marston, a teacher of physics, decided that physics could be taught in terms of how cities "work," with instruction in the interrelations between technological systems and natural systems. After testing his idea for five years in a large university and a four-year college, Marston wrote *The Dynamic Environment* (Xerox College Publishing, 1975). He says in his preface:

> My desire to build a foundation of understanding and appreciation of our technological systems determined that the text begin with water systems. Although our society takes water systems for granted, they are probably our most important life support systems. Water provides a dramatic way to illustrate both the dependence of cities and suburbs on rural areas and the profound effects technological systems have on the environment. Water also interacts very strongly with energy (hydro-electric power, coolant for steam electric plants, processing of oil shale) and is therefore a useful introduction to the last half of the text which deals with energy.

A point of importance is that students often *enjoy* learning about the environment in this way, absorbing the principles of physics in terms of a variety of applications vital to community welfare and human health. The teaching instruments are "a few, common physical models: the flow of water through aqueducts and pipes; the flow of people and vehicles on roads, tracks, and sidewalks; and the flow of energy as fuel through pipelines and as electricity over power grids. Work and power are relevant to all the systems considered, whether it is water being pumped over or through the mountains to Los Angeles or Denver, or coal being carried by train or oil flowing through pipelines, or autos and bicycles moving along highways and streets."

Engrossing extensions could be made locally by teachers using this text. Think, for example, of what could be done with the story of the watering of Los Angeles, a desert town that lives on water stolen from fertile valleys to the north.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
REVIVIFYING TRADITION

THERE is a kind of thinking which—although both rare and rarefied—should somehow be made present in the life of every child. In medieval times this thought (and feeling) was suggested by the light of the Holy Grail—a distant glimmer in the forest of life, uncertainly noticed through the veil of trees. To speak of this light too literally would be to vulgarize it—a form of sin against the Holy Ghost. To speak of it appropriately requires a touch of genius. Usually, the best use made of this idea takes the form of poetic comment on its influence, leading to spontaneous insight into life's meaning, with natural recognition of the obligations of human beings.

Humans seem to learn in two ways. They learn some (necessary) things through conformity to tradition. There is much practical wisdom in tradition. The so-called traditional societies transmitted the practice of the virtues without which human life would soon become intolerable. This is a reality ignored by the iconoclasts and revolutionists who see the inadequacy and sometimes evil of declining tradition—which can become very great—but lack perception of the sustaining strength which tradition gives to many lives.

The other mode of learning is through independent discovery, which includes the recognition of what truth there is in tradition, yet without submitting to the habits which assure its acceptance by the great majority. This recognition is equivalent to discovery of "new truth," although it may actually be very old.

One might call tradition the cultural codification of Necessity. Every trade, profession, and calling has adapted the lessons learned from necessity into customs for its practice. Hundreds and thousands of years of experience are compressed into the rules transmitted by tradition, saving the practitioners from making foolish mistakes. The only successful innovators are likely to be those few who also learn the origin—the rationale—of traditional rules, so that when necessity changes in character, they implement corresponding changes in the rules. Not many, at the beginning, understand the need for such changes, with the result that they are adopted only after considerable pain. It is in such circumstances that we are sometimes able to recognize true educators, as distinct from dutiful transmitters of tradition.

For example, consider the meaning of the word "providers"—a term once traditionally applied to fathers who give support to their families. Mothers provide equally but in another way. Dozens of little rules formed the tradition practiced by fathers and mothers. The spirit of their "conformity" held families together. In one of the chapters of *The Gift of Good Land* (North Point Press, 1981), Wendell Berry considers the impact of changing circumstances on what he calls "Family Work." Most of us, a few generations ago, grew our own food. Now, most of us don't. We don't experience the beneficent moral effect of traditional practice. Berry says:

> Forty years ago, for most of our people, whether they lived in the country or in town, this was less an ideal than a necessity, enforced both by tradition and by need. As is often so, it was only after family life and family work become (allegedly) unnecessary that we began to think of them as "ideals." . . .
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> I do think that the ideal is more difficult now than it was. We are trying to uphold it now mainly by will, without much help from necessity, and with no help at all from custom or public value. For most people now do seem to think that family life and family work are unnecessary, and this thought has been institutionalized in our economy and in our public values. Never before has private life been so preyed upon by public life. How can we preserve family life—if by that we mean, as I think we must, *home* life—when our attention is so forcibly drawn away from home?

Home life is weakened most obviously, he says, by television—"the medium which," as a

teacher recently declared, "is devoted almost entirely to selling mindless self-indulgence." Or as Berry puts it—

> If you have a TV, your children will be subjected almost from the cradle to an overwhelming insinuation that all worth experiencing is somewhere else and that all worth having must be bought. The purpose is blatantly to supplant the joy and beauty of health with cosmetics, clothes, cars, and ready-made desserts.

Next he considers the effect of public education, which, since we make it compulsory, is likely to be "mainly poor."

> I am not nearly so much concerned about its quality as I am about its *length*. My impression is that the chief, if unadmitted, purpose of the school system is to keep children away from home as much as possible. Parents want their children kept out of their hair, education is merely a byproduct, not overly prized. In many places, thanks to consolidation, two hours or more of travel time have been added to the school day. For my own children the regular school day from the first grade—counting from the time they went to catch the bus until they came home—was nine hours. An extracurricular activity would lengthen the day to eleven hours or more. This is not education, but a form of incarceration. Why should anyone be surprised if, under these circumstances children should become "disruptive" or even "ineducable"?
>
> If public education is to have any meaning or value at all, then public education *must* be supplemented by home education. I know this from my own experience as a college teacher. What can you teach a student whose entire education has been public, whose daily family life for twenty years has consisted of four or five hours of TV, who has never read a book for pleasure or even *seen* a book so read; whose only work has been school work, who has never learned to perform any essential task? Not much, so far as I could tell.

Berry is a man who has become fully aware of the *enormity* of this situation. Certain "necessities" were removed from our lives by turning agriculture into "factories in the field," and now look at what the resulting "freedom" has done to the family matrix for bringing up our children. What has Berry to say to parents who agree with him? Get rid of the TV he says, continuing with some further observations and suggestions:

> Getting rid of the TV, we understand, is not just a practical act, but also a symbolic one: we thus turn our backs on the invitation to consume; we shut out the racket of consumption. The ensuing silence is an invitation to our homes, to our own places and lives, to come into being. And we begin to recognize a truth disguised or denied by TV and all that it speaks and stands for: no life and no place is destitute; all have possibilities of productivity and pleasure, rest and work, solitude and conviviality that belong particularly to themselves. These possibilities exist everywhere, in the country or in the city, it makes no difference. All that is necessary is the time and the inner quietness to look for them, the sense to recognize them and the grace to welcome them. They are now most often lived out in home gardens and kitchens, libraries, and workrooms. But they are beginning to be worked out, too, in little parks, in vacant lots, in neighborhood streets. Where we live is also a place where our interest and our effort can be. But they can't be there by the means and modes of consumption. If we consume nothing but what we buy, we are living in "the economy," in "television land," not at home. It is productivity that rights the balance, that brings us home. Any way at all of joining and using the air and light and weather of your own place—even if it is only a window box, even if it is only an opened window—is a making and a having that you cannot get from TV or government or school.

Berry's mention of a window box recalls a visit to the MANAS office by a reader, a Colombian agronomist who had developed a theater group in Spanish Harlem in New York. Having seen a newspaper story about an elaborate window box invented by a California man, he came here to learn how to make one like it to introduce in the Harlem slums, enabling people there to grow some of their own food. It was a simple sort of "greenhouse," to be installed on fire escapes. It had a built-in irrigator and a reflector to catch the sunlight, with a transparent plastic front to hold in the heat during winter. This mini-greenhouse could grow vegetables the year round on six "shelves" of fertile soil. As Berry says, the possibilities are endless.

FRONTIERS

What Makes for Peace?

TWO months ago a MANAS lead article (Feb. 3) sampled news stories on the arguments about weapons and strategy for nuclear war, concluding that the best thing to do would be to "fill our minds with other themes." A good illustration of what the MANAS writer had in mind appeared in a passage by Joel Schatz in *Rain* for January, under the heading "Imagine Peace":

> Our next project is to try to visualize peace. We're asking ourselves the question that hurts our brains "If peace broke out, what would it look like?" It sounds terrific. We've thought about it now for two or three months and collected some notes. We're going to start consulting and writing letters and talking with thousands of people—whoever has an idea.
>
> We're not talking about these ideas in the abstract—the ultimate political folly of the United Nations and most government foreign policies is that the conversation is so abstract that no one really knows what he's talking about. If peace were really pursued (given the extraordinary decadence of this culture and the extraordinary poverty of Third World nations whose materials we use to power our extraordinary decadence), what would life be like for us next week? How would our clothing be different? How would our travel plans be different? What would we be doing differently in school? What kinds of jobs would we have? What would be the nature of business? What would be the nature of government? What would life be like for 153 countries plus the United States? What would it be like, given the fact that the U.N. now records 5,000 religions on this planet? How do you strike some common sense resource balance and then picture it? What would it look like? How would we proceed? I'm convinced that we can't move in that direction until we see where we're moving. Madison Avenue has known this forever, lay the image out and people will go for it.
>
> What we're doing now is building a systematic set of questions for widespread distribution to gather specific answers for the composition of wholistic peace imagery.

Joel Schatz is talking about social or community arrangements which make a natural matrix for a peaceful life, a weave of self-reliant and cooperative projects which are *consistent* with peace. Our lives now are too much taken up with activities which, if you look at their consequences, are noticeably consistent with war. It is the same way with health. People can't really be healthy unless they live lives consistent with being healthy. Health is not a goal reached by a big, one-shot effort. Getting rid of ills is not a matter of sharpshooting at first this disorder, then that one. Health is the condition in which everything works well with everything else—which means that for us, it begins with a state of mind, an attitude which seeks and absorbs the ingredients of a healthy way of life.

If you ride around the country, you don't see much effort along this line, in either case, for peace or health. Yet if you look more closely, the effort is there, and gradually it will become more noticeable. We are thinking of the news we get in the MANAS mail. Throughout the land there are germs, seeds, tender young plants, and here and there vigorous young saplings growing up in the mode of a peaceful, healthy life. And here and there even government agencies are helping to spread the word of how this is done.

California is an example—a state where there is plenty of the worst, yet some of the best, too. The California Office of Appropriate Technology has just published *Local Energy Initiatives: A Second Look*, which tells what individuals and groups were doing in the state during 1981—by cities and counties. In brief:

> In California, a clear shift has been made in energy use. Leadership has moved from the federal to state and local levels. Local officials deserve much of the credit for what California has accomplished so far: our energy initiatives are pacing similar activity nationwide.

What Alexis de Tocqueville said a hundred and fifty year ago (in *Democracy in America*) applies today:

> In a local community a citizen may conceive of some need which is not being met. What does he do? He goes across the street and discusses it with his neighbor. Then what happens? A committee comes

> into existence and begins functioning in behalf of that need. . . . All of this is done by the private citizens on their own initiative.

When alert and inventive citizens act in this way, government may respond with some help. (The California Office of Appropriate Technology has also issued a useful booklet, *Common Sense Wind Energy,* describing the value and the available options of wind power.)

Similar activities are going on in New England, in Minnesota, and especially in Oregon, where *Rain* is published. Effective opinion-makers keep on with their work. In *Country Journal* for last November, Lester R. Brown wrote on "Why We must Change the Way We Live," calling for "voluntary simplicity," which means "to acquire goods only to satisfy basic needs and to seek a high satisfaction in personal development, in human relationships, in intellectual and spiritual growth." People tired of satiety and "always more" are choosing simplicity because of its healthful appeal. Socially, simplicity is backed by the onset of necessity. Brown offers this common sense:

> . . . in the late twentieth century, the key to national security is sustainability. If the biological underpinnings of the global economic system cannot be secured, and if in particular new energy sources and systems are not in place, as the oil wells begin to go dry, then economic disruptions and breakdowns are inevitable. In effect, the traditional military concept of "national security" grows ever less adequate as nonmilitary threats grow more formidable.

These ideas are spreading—slowly, of course, but perhaps more rapidly than we think. And when pessimists raise objections because the change-agents are so few, it is well to remember the numerical ratio of germ cells to somatic cells, and then reflect on how much a few germ cells are able to do.

One more example of the gathering strength of local initiative and regional thinking is *Knowing Home—Studies for a Possible Portland* ($5 from *Rain,* 2270 N.W. Irving, Portland, Oregon 97210), edited by the *Rain* staff. This book has eighty-eight large pages of material by Oregonians on how to improve their city and region. Steve Johnson concludes his opening article:

> To rephrase one of the most rephrased of phrases, "it's what you can do for your region and what your region can do for you." We are not taught in our schools about the place we live in terms of an interplay of natural and manmade systems. Such an education would allow us to answer questions like: Where does your water come from and where does it go as wastewater? What watershed do you live in? Where does your energy for heat come from? Where does the food you eat grow?