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EMERSON'S "EVOLUTION"

READING in *Emerson in his Journals* (*Harvard* University Press, 1982), Joel Porte's selections from the sixteen volumes of the scholarly edition of what the New England philosopher set down in his massive diary, we came across some reflections about California. He wrote some time in 1854:

> Thoreau thinks 'tis immoral to dig gold in California; immoral to leave creating value, & go to augmenting the representative of value, & so altering and diminishing real value, &, that, of course, the fraud will appear.
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> I conceive that work to be as innocent as any other speculating. Every man should do what he can, & he was created to augment some real value, & not for a speculator. When he leaves or postpones (as most men do) his proper work, & adopts some short or cunning method, as of watching markets, or farming in any manner the ignorance of the people, as, in buying by the acre to sell by the foot, he is fraudulent, he is malefactor, so far; & is bringing society to bankruptcy. But nature watches over all this, too & turns this malfaisance to some good. For, California gets peopled, subdued, civilised, in this fictitious way, & on this fiction a real prosperity is rooted & grown.

Those were days when a good many enterprising and unattached New Englanders were asking themselves, "Should I go to California and dig for gold?" Many of them tried it, but history shows that it was the merchants, and later the railroad builders, who made the money. Emerson stayed home and *thought* about gold-digging and other acquisitive pursuits. He spent his life recording notes and essays exploring the human calling. What should humans be doing with their lives?

Quite evidently, Emerson believed that they should *think*—think and make decisions worthy of this human capacity, improving the common life. This was, a century later, Ortega's view also. The human being, constantly involved with external happenings—gold strikes, wars, industrial enterprises, opportunities and dangers—has need, from time to time, to "detach himself from his surroundings, ignore them, and subjecting his faculty of attention to a radical shift—incomprehensible zoologically —turn, so to speak, his back on the world and take his stand inside himself, attend to his own inwardness or, what is the same thing, concern himself with himself and not with that which is *other,* with things. . . ." This, for Ortega, was the highest functional good. "Without a strategic retreat into the self, without vigilant thought, human life is impossible." Simone Weil, too, wrote of the human "power to interpose, between the impulse and the act, the tiny interval that is reflection," adding, "Where there is no room for reflection, there is none either for justice or prudence."

This is the immeasurable value of Emerson—to his, ours, or any time. Instead of only a tiny interval, he gave to reflection an entire life. What to others were momentary interruptions, passing pangs of conscience, vague apprehensions or feeble inspirations, were for him central engagements. Things made the interruptions he suffered, not inner admonitions which flowed through his mind in a calm and even stream. The Journals contain the private thought of fifty years. The entries lack the studied perfection of the essays, being filled instead with glancing blows, sharply penetrating simplifications, and rapier thrusts such as "Our senator was of that stuff that our best hope lay in his drunkenness, as that sometimes incapacitated him from doing mischief."

Emerson's growing pains as well as his insights are in the journals. He said of the profession he gave up:

> The clergy are as like as peas, I can not tell them apart. It was said, they have bronchitis, because

> of reading from their paper sermon with a near voice, & then, looking at the audience, they try to speak with their far voice, & the shock is noxious. I think they do the same, or the reverse, with their thought. They look into Plato or into the mind, & then try to make parish & unitarian mince-meat of the amplitudes & eternities; & the shock is noxious.

Yet he was certainly a preacher himself. At thirty-six he wrote:

> In these golden days it behoves me once more to make my annual inventory of the world. For the last five years I have read each winter a new course of lectures in Boston, and each was my creed & confession of faith. Each told all I thought of the past, the present, & the future. Once more I must renew my work and I think only once in the same form though I see that he who thinks he does something for the last time ought not do it at all. Yet my objection is not to the thing but to the form; & the concatenation of errors called society to which I still consent, until my plumes be grown, makes even a duty of this concession also. So I submit to sell tickets again. But the form is neither here nor there. What shall be the substance of my shrift? Adam in the garden, I am to new name all the beasts in the field & all the gods in the Sky. I am to invite men drenched in time to recover themselves & come out of time, & taste their native immortal air. I am to fire with what skill I can the artillery of sympathy & emotion. I am to indicate constantly, though all unworthy, the Ideal and Holy Life, the life within life— the Forgotten Good, the Unknown Cause in which we sprawl and sin. I am to try the magic of sincerity, that luxury permitted only to kings & poets. I am to celebrate the spiritual powers in their infinite contrast to the mechanical powers & the mechanical philosophy of this time. I am to console the brave sufferers under evils whose end they cannot see by appeals to the great optimum self-affirmed in all bosoms.

Where do the Emersons come from? To assign heredity as cause for such a man is to propose that fleas may grow into condors. Where do all the great ones come from— Plato and Plotinus, Pico, Shakespeare, and in the East, Lao tse and the Buddha? Emerson contributed to the setting of this problem, although he did not answer the question. Did he know?

He said:

> There is no history: There is only biography. The attempt to perpetuate, to fix a thought or principle, fails continually. You can only live for yourself: Your action is good only whilst it is alive—whilst it is in you. The awkward imitation of it by your child or your disciple, is not a repetition of it, is not the same thing but another thing. The new individual must work out the whole problem of science, letters, & theology for himself, can owe his fathers nothing. There is no history; only biography.

Of course there is history, but Emerson is saying that history does not make men, it is the other way around. Men leave tracks, and the resulting pattern is history. He had something to say about how good, although not extraordinary, men are made.

> A great genius must come & preach self reliance. Our people are timid, desponding, recreant whimperers. If they fail in their first enterprise they lose all heart. If the young merchant fails, men say he is RUINED. If the finest genius studies at the Cambridge Divinity College, and is not ordained within a year afterwards in Boston, or New York it seems to his friend & himself that he is justified in being disheartened & in complaining for the rest of his life.
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> A sturdy New Hampshire or Vermonter who in turn tries *all* the professions, who teams it, farms it, peddles, keeps a school, preaches, edits a newspaper, goes to Congress, & so forth, in successive years, and always like a cat falls on his feet, is worth a hundred of these Boston dolls. My brave Henry here who is content to live now, & feels no shame in not studying any profession, for he does not postpone his life but lives already—pours contempt on these crybabies of routine and Boston. He has not one chance but a hundred chances. Now let a stern preacher arise who shall reveal the resources of Man, & tell men they are not leaning willows, but can & must detach themselves, that a man, a woman, is a sovereign eternity, born to shed healing to the nations; that he should be ashamed of our compassion, & that the moment he acts from himself, tossing the laws, the books, the idolatries, the customs, out of the window, we pity him, we pity her no more, but thank & revere them that with the exercise of self-trust new powers shall appear.

Emerson reveals himself in his choice of images, metaphors, and the octaves of his imagination. He lived in his mind, a rich and

capacious universe. So do we all live in our minds, but he knew his residence for a spacious kingdom and gave attention to its furnishings. "Life consists," he said, "in what a man is thinking of all day." The question, then, is what principle of selection gives focus to his thought. Hearing of the gold to be dug in California, he was led only to make an expanding amendment to a judgment by Thoreau. Actually, he sketched the future history of the California, which became a prosperous place where grew up numerous experts in the farming of the ignorance of the people, and especially experts skilled "in buying by the acre to sell by the foot." But these clever people did not think themselves the malefactors Emerson called them, and never dreamed that they would bring the society to bankruptcy.

Yet the signs, for all of California's "productivity" and prosperity, are already on the horizon. The southern half of the state is desert country and is likely, perhaps sooner than we think, to return to its original condition. As George Sibley wrote in *Harper's* for October, 1977, one of the dryest of years, there is simply not enough water to supply the expanding needs of Los Angeles and points south—not in the Colorado River or anywhere else. Anticipating continuing claims to be made on this resource, Sibley describes the future result:

> Billion-gallon, billion-dollar aqueducts consigned to running half-empty; reservoirs with their tub rings from the early-Seventies high 200 feet above the diminishing water level; fields turning a dazzling white as the sun carries the overworked water off to the heavens, leaving behind the cruel burden of salt; desalination plants gulping great quantities of power to eke out a thin stream of marginal water . . . . and the cities. Oh, the cities, not cities of the desert but the desert-negated: dry pools popping up out of the ground, the bleaching unusable deck chairs on the brown grass under the leafless orange tree, the tedious count of gallons to see whether one more shower this month will cost 4 cents or go over the limit for $4 . . . the pleasant climate will not be so pleasant when water can't be taken for granted: it will be a great deal like—well, like living in the desert.

Emerson's "bankruptcy" does not seem a strong enough word for this sort of denouement. And the "real prosperity" which he thought would grow out of the malfaisance of the promoters, while it came in profusion, has mainly kept people from thinking about the future at all.

Reading in Joel Porte's book of passages from Emerson's journals makes one wonder if there could be a planet populated by Emersons and Thoreaus, with a Whitman or two thrown in for good measure. What "problems," if any, would such a population have? What would their institutions be like? Emerson's design, composed in 1839, gives his thinking about education:

> An education in things is not: we all are involved in the condemnation of words, an Age of words. We are shut up in schools & college recitation rooms for ten or fifteen years & come out at last with a bellyful of words & do not know a thing. We cannot use our hands or our legs or our eyes or our arms. We do not know an edible root in the woods. We cannot tell our course by the stars nor the hour of the day by the sun. It is well if we can swim & skate. We are afraid of a horse, of a cow, of a dog, of a cat of a spider. Far better was the Roman rule to teach a boy nothing that he could not learn standing. Now here are my wise young neighbors who instead of getting like the wordmen into a railroad car where they have not even the activity of holding the reins, have got into a boat which they have built with their own hands, with sails which they have contrived to serve as a tent by night, & gone up the river Merrimack to live by their wits on the fish of the stream & the berries of the wood. My worthy neighbor Dr. Bartlettt expressed a true parental instinct when he desired to send his boy with them to learn something. The farm is the right school. The reason of my deep respect for the farmer is that he is a realist & not a dictionary. The farm is a piece of the world, the School house is not. The farm by training the physical rectifies & invigorates the metaphysical & moral nature.

Emerson now has good company in a writer like Wendell Berry.

What of religion on this utopian planet? Only sectarians would fear the Emersonian brand (the misfortune being that they are probably still in the majority):

The whole world is in conspiracy against itself in religious matters. The best experience is beggarly when compared with the immense possibilities of man. Divine as the life of Jesus is, what an outrage to represent it as tantamount to the Universal! To seize one accidental good man that happened to exist somewhere at some time and say to the new born soul, Behold thy pattern; aim no longer to possess entire Nature, to fill the horizon, to fill the infinite amplitude of being with great life, to be in sympathy & relation with all creatures, to lose all privateness by sharing all natural action, shining with the Day, undulating with the Sea, growing with the tree, instinctive with the animals, entranced in beatific vision with the human reason.

At twenty-four he was asking basic questions, such as, "Who is he that has seen God of whom so much is known or where is one that has risen from the dead?" The nature of God, he confided to his diary, "may be different from what he is represented. I never behold him. I do not know that he exists." Then, at thirty-two he recorded:

I know nothing of the source of my being but I will not soil my nest. I know much of it after a high negative way but nothing after the understanding. God himself contradicts through me & all his creatures the miserable babble of Kneeland [a notorious atheist] & his crew but if they set me to affirm in propositions his character and providence as I would describe a mountain or an Indian, I am dumb. Oft I have doubted of his person, never that truth is divine.

He mused five years later:

We say that our virtue & genius are unconscious, that they are the influx of God, & the like. The objector replies that to represent the Divine Being as an unconscious somewhat, is abhorrent, &c. But the unconsciousness we spake of was merely relative to *us*; we speak, we act from we know not what higher principle, and we describe its circumambient quality by confessing the subjection of our perception to it, we cannot overtop, oversee it—not see at all its channel into us. But in saying this we predicate nothing of its consciousness or unconsciousness in relation to itself. We see at once that we have no language subtle enough for distinctions in that inaccessible region. That air is too rare for the wings of words. We cannot say God is self conscious or not self-conscious; for the moment we cast our eye on that dread nature, we see that it is the wisdom of wisdom, the love of love, the power of power, & soars infinitely out of all definition & dazzles all inquest.

Emerson wrote, he said, in a time when "the mind has become aware of itself." As the quotations we have made show, he was himself intensely aware of this. There was a natural fit between this awareness and his emphasis on self-reliance. It would follow that in a human society made up of Emersons and Thoreaus, the part played by habit and conditioning would be reduced to a minimum. Thought would be developed and confirmed in terms of family resemblances between men's ideas, independently reached, instead of by copying one another. Emerson was after self-knowledge as the source of all other knowing, and of the certainty in knowing. It was for him exactly what Maslow noted, more than a century later:

On the one hand I've talked about uncovering or discovering your idiosyncrasy, the way in which you are different from everybody else in the whole world. Then on the other hand I've spoken about discovering your specieshood, your humanness. As Carl Rogers has phrased it: "How does it happen that the deeper we go into ourselves as particular and unique, seeking for our own individual identity, the more we find the whole human species. Doesn't that remind you of Ralph Waldo Emerson and the New England Transcendentalists? Discovering your species-hood, at a deep enough level, merges with discovering your selfhood.

Reading Emerson for a substantial length of time has one unmistakable effect. You begin to feel that we live in a world of meaning, that this is the area of genuine discovery and growth for human beings. The strong contrast of this feeling is with the modern "traditional" view, that we live in a world of matter and its random motions. Emerson found order and symmetry in experience, not a senseless jumble of happenings. The mind, he believed and showed, is the instrument of discovery—discovery of order in the world and purpose in human life. This is the "progress" that is going on, not only for individuals, but for cultures (rather than nations). "I am," he said, "to

celebrate the spiritual powers in their infinite contrast to the mechanical powers & the mechanical philosophy of this time."

The use of these powers is no "effect," but the exercise of causation. Emerson did not believe that we are prisoners of circumstance, but its makers. In a little known address given in Boston in 1838 he said:

> Thus always we are daunted by the appearances; not seeing that their whole value lies at bottom in the state of mind. It is really a thought that built this portentous war establishment, and a thought shall also melt it away. Every nation and every man instantly surround themselves with a material apparatus which exactly corresponds to their moral state, or their state of thought. . . . It follows of course that the least change in the man will change his circumstances. . . . War and peace thus resolve themselves into a mercury of the state of cultivation. At a certain stage of his progress, the man fights, if he be of a sound body and mind. At a certain higher stage he makes no offensive demonstration, but is alert to repel injury, and of an unconquerable heart. At a still higher stage he comes into the region of holiness; passion has passed away from him, his war-like nature is all converted into an active medicinal principle. . . .
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> The cause of peace is not the cause of cowardice. If peace is sought to be defended or preserved for the safety of the luxurious and the timid, it is a sham and the peace will be base. War is better, and the peace will be broken. If peace is to be maintained, it must be by brave men, who have come up to the same height as the hero, namely, the will to carry their life in their hand, and stake it at any instant for their principle, but who have gone one step beyond the hero, and will not seek another man's life, men who have, by their intellectual insight or else by their moral elevation, attained such a perception of their own intrinsic worth that they do not think property or their own body a sufficient good to be saved by such dereliction of principle as treating a man like a sheep.

Here Emerson speaks as an evolutionist—with more sense and appeal than Darwin.

REVIEW
THE ANCIENT GREEKS

IN order to keep track of the ripples as well as the tides of modern thought—in order to select what seems worth present attention—reviewers have to read a great deal. Fortunately, the technique of sampling serves the reviewer well—that is, reading a paragraph or two may be enough to justify laying a book aside; or, sometimes, going on. Here, we want to discuss one effect of the good books that are read through, over the years. Many of their writers seem to have more than a casual acquaintance with Greek philosophy, Greek drama, Greek culture. One book in particular provides evidence of this—W. Macneile Dixon's *Hellas Revisited.* Dixon was an English scholar who taught literature at the University of Edinburgh. Happily, he was invited to give the Gifford Lectures for 1935-37, and the result was a book, *The Human Situation,* that MANAS contributors have been quoting for close to thirty-five years. The quality of this writer's mind led to looking up all that he wrote, and *Hellas Revisited* told of the travels in Greece of a man who seemed to know the Greek classics by heart. This is without doubt the most engrossing "travel" book we have ever read, in the sense that it gives vivid life to the ancient Greeks and their ways of thinking and doing.

It also led to a practice that has become a minor habit— trying to understand and enjoy Greek drama. At the beginning the attempt was pretty much of a failure. Reading something because you *should,* and not because you are drawn to it is, you could say, doomed from the start. But there remains the embarrassing question, What if there is actually something wrong with my *taste?* So we continued with the try, not making much headway until we came across Eric Havelock's *Prometheus*—a translation of and essay on *Prometheus Bound.* The immeasurable power of the myth seems to justify the stark austerity of Aeschylus. His account of the confrontation between the Greek Saviour and the dictator Zeus has resonances running throughout history. So does his fate. So does his hope. And Havelock's essay helps to universalize the drama's meaning. The best men and women, you begin to feel, are all Prometheans.

Next came Sophocles—*Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colon*us. The problems lessened but did not go away. You must keep reading them, and trying to feel their meaning, and asking questions such as: How would you compare Sophocles with Aeschylus? and do you know enough to attempt it?

Such doubts, no doubt, are healthy. This week we want to report on two books about the Greeks that have helped in all directions, becoming part of our curriculum, used for casual dipping into, in odd moments, almost daily. They are Werner Jaeger's *Paideia* and Edith Hamilton's *The Greek Way.* Both writers loved and admired the Greeks. Both help to make them contemporary, as they ought to be for us. They both seem to think that the Greeks—Greek thinkers, Greek artists—were greater than anyone else in human history, and lovers of the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* will question this conclusion, but except for this the books we have named seem beyond criticism. They frame nearly all serious reading with the substance of Greek vision, Greek philosophy, Greek virtue.

There is this in Jaeger's Introduction (his translator is Gilbert Highet):

> The revolutionary, epoch-making position held by the Greeks in the history of education cannot be explained in a few sentences. The purpose of this book is to give an account of their culture, their *paideia,* and to describe its peculiar character and its historical development. It was not a sum of several abstract ideas; it was Greek history itself, in all its concrete reality. But the facts of Greek history would long ago have sunk into oblivion if the Greeks had not moulded them into a permanent form—the expression of their highest will, of their resistance to change and destiny. At the earliest stage of their development they had no clear conception of the nature of this act of will. But as they moved into ever clearer vision, along their historical path, the ever

> present aim of their life came to be more and more vividly defined. It was the creation of a higher type of man. They believed that education embodied the purpose of all human effort. It was, they held, the ultimate justification for the existence of both the individual and the community. At the summit of their development, that was how they interpreted their nature and task. There is no reasonable ground for the assumption that we could understand them any better through some superior insight, psychological, historical, or social. Even the majestic works of archaic Greece can best be understood in this light, for they were created by the same spirit. And it was ultimately in the form of paideia, "culture," that the Greeks bequeathed the whole achievement of the Hellenic mind to the other nations of antiquity. Augustus envisaged the task of the Roman empire in terms of Greek culture. Without Greek cultural ideas Greco-Roman civilization would not have been a historical unity, and the culture of the western world would never have existed.

But the ancient Greeks, it will be said, fouled up. They became imperialists. The Athenians fought that stupid war with the Spartans, bringing to an end their hope of authentic greatness. They murdered the Melians only because they were stronger, and they poisoned Socrates, bringing a once so promising history to a shameful and ignominious end. Unquestionably, they failed.

But they *tried,* and this seems to be what we are unable to do. They at least showed what imperfect and fallible humans are capable of, in spite of historical failure.

This is surely one great reason for learning from them, reading about them, renewing their ideas, rescuing and adopting their ideals as part of our own lives, in these, our own days of failure. The fact remains that history goes on. Humanity always seems to get another chance—however slim. And *Prometheus Bound* is a text for understanding our situation.

Jaeger compares Sophocles and Aeschylus. The real strength of Sophocles, he says, "did not consist in dramatizing problems, although as the successor to Aeschylus he inherited the ideas and problems with which Aeschylus had dealt.

> Of course, he was bound to be technically superior to old Aeschylus since he belonged to the second generation, the generation which always refines and subtilizes the work of the pioneer. Yet how can we explain the fact that all attempts to satisfy the changed taste of today by putting Aeschylus and Euripides on the modern stage have failed—apart from a few experimental productions before more or less specialized audiences—while Sophocles is the one Greek dramatic who keeps his place in the repertoire of the contemporary theater. . . .
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> The ineffaceable impression which Sophocles makes on us today and his imperishable position in the literature of the world are both due to his character-drawing. . . . As a creator of men, Sophocles has a place in the history of human culture essentially unlike that of any other Greek poet. In his work the fully awakened sense of culture is made manifest for the first time. It is something totally different from the educational effect of Homer or the educational purpose of Aeschylus. It assumes the existence of a society whose highest ideal is *culture,* the formation of perfect human character; and such an assumption was impossible until, after one entire generation had struggled to discover the meaning of destiny, after the sore spiritual agonies of Aeschylus, humanity itself had become the center of life.
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> To the question, "What is the nature and meaning of this life?" Sophocles does not reply like Aeschylus with a theory of the universe, justifying the ways of God to man, but simply by the form of his speech and the character of his men and women.

We have little enough space to devote to Edith Hamilton's book; indeed, for both these works we are able only to indicate their temper and mood. Edith Hamilton (who with Huntington Cairns edited the Pantheon edition of the complete works of Plato, now unfortunately out of print) singles out qualities in the Greeks which make us feel more at home with them. To show how strongly they believed in reason, she says:

> There is nothing clearer and nothing more astonishing than the strict limits the Greeks set to the power of the priests. Priests in numbers there were and altars and temples, and at a time of public danger, disrespect shown to the forms of religion would arouse even in Athens superstition and popular fury, but the place of the priest in Greece was in the

> background. The temple was his and the temple rites, and nothing else. . . .
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> No doubt the oracles, at Delphi notably, played a prominent role in Greece, but none of the oracular sayings that have come down to us bear the familiar priestly stamp. Athens seeking guidance from the Delphic priestess at the time of the Persian invasion is not told to sacrifice hecatombs to the god and offer precious treasure to the oracles, but merely to defend herself with wooden walls, a piece of acute worldly wisdom, at least as interpreted by Themistocles. When Croesus the rich, the king of Lydia, sent to Delphi to find out if he would succeed in a war against Persia and paved his way by magnificent gifts, any priests in the world except the Greeks would have made their profit for their church by an intimation that the costlier the offering the surer his success, but the only answer the Greek holy of holies gave him was that by going to war he would destroy a great empire. It happened to be his own, but, as the priestess pointed out, she was not responsible for his lack of wit, and certainly there was no intimation that if he had given more, things would have turned out better. The sentences which Plato says were inscribed in the shrine at Delphi are singularly unlike those to be found in holy places outside of Greece. *Know thyself* was the first, and *Nothing in excess* the second, both marked by a total absence of the idiom of priestly formulas the world over.

These counsels, we might note, still engage the best thinkers of our time. A. H. Maslow devoted a productive life to the first, and E. F. Schumacher provided an in-depth application of the second. Finally, it might be said that the Delphian Oracle was more useful to the Greeks than our famous computers are to us.

COMMENTARY
AN EXTRA-TERRITORIAL PERSPECTIVE

MORE than once, in the past, MANAS has quoted from the scholarly journal, *Arion,* published by Boston University, on the uses of classical learning in the present. For contrast with what Charles Weingartner says in this week's "Children" about present educational research—"the mindless pursuit of technique lacking any philosophical base"—we recall once again the reflections of D. S. Carne-Ross (in *Arion* for the Spring of 1973) on the parallels which may be drawn between Athenian civilization and our own. Speaking of the work of William Arrowsmith, another classicist, he refers to the "much-doingness" of the Greeks—"that quality of spectacular restless energy that made the Athenians both the glory and the bane of the Hellenic world." The Greeks had a formidable word for this quality—*polupragmosune.* Prof. Carne-Ross says:

> He [Arrowsmith] goes on: "In political terms, *polupragmosune* is the very spirit of Athenian imperialism, its remorseless need to expand, the *hybris* of power and energy in a spirited people; in moral terms, it is a divine discontent and an impatience with necessity, a disease whose symptoms are disorder, corruption, and the hunger for change." We ourselves possess most of the ingredients that go to compose this word. It is *polupragmosune* that sends our bombers to Vietnam and our crewcut astronauts crawling on the moon and sends half a dozen trucks and bulldozers to havoc the perfectly adequate country road in Maine beside which I live. We have the ingredients but interestingly enough we have no single word that comprehends them, no word through which to comprehend, and contemplate, the full span of our *polupragmosune.*

Yet Prof. Carne-Ross is not persuaded that if Lyndon Johnson had read Thucydides on the Sicilian expedition of the Athenians, "things might have gone differently in Vietnam."

> I suspect that the former President would have read only what he thought he already knew. We need to revise . . . and say that if we had a certain number of people—an intellectual community—capable of regarding our affairs from the extra-territorial perspective that Greece can provide, then things might go differently in Vietnam and in our society at large.

That perspective, he says, is "a means of bringing trained, critical mind to bear on gross and carefully nourished confusion."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
MEANINGLESS RESEARCH

OVER the years, the MANAS library has been acquiring copies of the AAAS weekly, *Science,* so that the stack of back issues is now measured in feet rather than inches. What to do with them? Should they be bound? So much of the material appearing in *Science* is of interest only to specialists that ordinary editors will limit their attention to titles and summaries. But then, from time to time, Sci*ence* publishes valuable generalizing and critical material that deserves review—what about that? Looking through our editorial index of magazines quoted, we found that during our thirty-five years of publishing we have used material found in *Science* about seventy-five times, some of it so cogent that we quoted it again and again. We really shouldn't throw such contextual sources away! But then, on the other hand, there is the cost of binding and the problem of shelf space.

Another consideration supervenes. We have the strong feeling that, in years to come, the underlying stance of scientific inquiry will change, and that a great deal of all that "empirical data" will be forgotten as irrelevant. Maybe we could use the old volumes for firewood. Irreverent thought! So we keep putting off such decisions.

Meanwhile, we have been reading in the Summer 1982 *Et Cetera* an article by Charles Weingartner on "Education Research." He would certainly vote for the firewood option in the case of the "research" material on education, for nearly all of it. But then, his article is largely made up of quotations from the exceptions! These are slashing, devastating critiques of typical educational research.

The value of such writing is its effect of freeing the reader from reliance on authority in matters where, quite obviously, there can be no authority. From an educational point of view (and any other of importance), this may be the most significant change under way during the closing years of the twentieth century.

Weingartner (who in 1969 co-authored with Neil Postman, *Et Cetera's* editor, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*) is an expert at undermining confidence in fraudulent claims. He invites to the scary freedom of thinking instead of believing. New ideas, an old rule goes, must be planted on clean places. Weingartner is active in clean-up operations.

He starts out by affirming that the best work done in educational research was accomplished by scholars in other fields, naming as examples Adelbert Ames and I. A. Richards. Meanwhile, the prevailing activity among titled educational researchers has been the "generation and manipulation" of "data" by means of questionnaires unlikely to reveal anything worth knowing. Much attention is given to developing the technique of such inquiries, wholly neglectful of the fact, as noted by Jacques Ellul, that in educational research "one tendency that accompanies a preoccupation with technique is for discourse relating to it [technique] to displace questions as to whether or not it should be pursued at all." The experts expatiate on how to do what may not be worth doing. Such applications of technique, Weingartner says, "will probably make things worse rather than better."

> Our whole society is an illustration of this danger. The most crucial sociological and ecological problems we face, with their concomitant psychological, economic, and political consequences, are a result of the mindless pursuit of technique lacking any philosophical base, except the production of short-term monetary profit. The pollution of our air and water, the poisoning of our land—and virtually every form of life on it and in it and above it—for example, are direct results of the lack of an intervening mechanism which asks questions about who should decide which techniques can or should be used and for what purposes or objectives, along with which objectives and the techniques can be expected both to achieve and not to achieve, along with questions about the probable long-term effects of the application of the technique.

Why do researchers go on this way—on and on? The answer is simple. Technique is easy to discuss, meaning and value difficult. So the technicians do what they think they are good at even if the results don't apply to the areas needing attention. Tolstoy wrote effectively about this anomaly; so did Camus. But the institutions which develop all those "research" papers have long since been unable to hear Tolstoy or Camus. Institutions, in the nature of things, vulgarize and trivialize knowledge. This seems to be a law which applies to all attempts to make finite (solvable) the problems which have an incommensurable element in them—the problems that call for divergent rather than convergent thinking. There are regions of inquiry in which statistical studies are useless, and the researchers Weingartner is talking about need to learn where their methods apply and where they do not. Plato's *Republic* is a basic text for instruction in how to make this distinction.

Weingartner takes another step in his criticism:

> Much of what occurs under the rubric of "educational research" is politically, not educationally, motivated. It is the collation and manipulation of statistics in response to political decisions either by executive fiat or by laws enacted by a legislative body; it is totally lacking in any coherent or even poorly articulated educational philosophy. The basis for most educational research, I am saying, is political, not educational. For example, I have a copy of a memo from the staff of the budget committee of a state legislature addressed to the staff of the education committee of that same legislature. The memo instructs the education committee "to get with accountability because it has political sex appeal."

These are the people to whom, in our innocence and faith, we entrust the shaping of our educational institutions. This memo recalls the similar communication from Washington to an energy research committee Laura Nader was working with. "More tables, less text," the bureaucrat administrator demanded in the reports coming from the researchers. "These guys can't read." Such are the people in charge of serving the "general welfare" of the country.

Weingartner has a choice quotation to offer on the uselessness of scores on "standardized tests," which, he says, are "just about all educational research is devoted to dealing with." Charles E. Goshen wrote (on "The Tyranny of Numbers") in the Feb. 2, 1960, *Saturday Review:*

> Man's ability to construct mathematical models of nature has become such a highly developed skill that the self-confidence it inspires sets up an almost insurmountable obstacle to the introduction of new thinking. Few scientists acknowledge to themselves that mathematics, far from being a fact in nature, is a man-made, hypothetical model of nature. This lack of realization is responsible for the assumption by many, if not most, scientists that the only genuine test of truth lies in the ability to construct a mathematical equivalent, and in assuming that the behavior of this model is identical with the behavior of nature. The fact that close parallels often exist between mathematics and nature seems to confirm the deception. Actually, of course, mathematics is only a way of expressing man's interpretation of nature, and there is no objective reason to suppose that the rigid and arbitrary rules on which we build our "language of numbers" indicate the existence of "laws of nature."
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> Science has allowed itself to fall into the same trap which the medieval scholastic philosophers did, that of becoming infatuated with the language itself and deriving "truths" from arbitrary rules originally built into it. Quantitation has become a kind of god which is worshipped in much the same way that the monastic philosophers worshipped their God. In both cases, all truth is required to fit into a predetermined system of ritualistic logic. In one case it had to fit into "the will of God." In the other case, it is required to fit into a mathematical formula. Any other class of theory is heretic, being despised as "lacking in precision," a modern-day equivalent to the older condemnation, "work of the devil."

There are more than a dozen such quotations in Weingartner's article. And his own comment is equally good.

FRONTIERS
Disarmament—Two Views

THE May-June issue of *Gandhi Marg* is a tome of some 450 pages, entirely devoted to "Disarmament and Human Survival." The horrors of nuclear war play a large part in nearly all the contributions. Much space is given to ways of influencing governments and the leaders of governments. There are thirty-seven contributors, about twenty of them academics. Eleven are Europeans or Americans. All are well-informed and articulate. (The publisher of *Gandhi Marg* is the Gandhi Peace Foundation, 221 Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg, New Delhi, 110002, India, and the price of this issue $5.00.)

The most thoughtful of the writers seem to reach a common conclusion, which may be put in the brief words of Thomas à Kempis: "All men desire peace, but very few desire those things which make for peace." For obvious reasons, writers and speakers close to government positions deal more with the fact and threat of war than with its causes. Searching seriously into the causes of war would seem to them an undesirable change of subject, likely to lose them their status and their jobs. Then there is the broad consideration that actual abolition of war would mean the abolition of states as we know them. Getting ready for war and taking part in it are processes that are woven into the texture of both our traditions and our everyday lives, however little we may be aware of it. Yet after thousands of years of engagement in periodic wars we are now confronted by the stern logic of our own overdeveloped capacity for destruction.

While various prophets were able to foresee this destiny almost no one listened to them or took them seriously, and now, little by little, their predictions are coming true before our eyes. Only the blind are free from bewilderment. Can the peoples of the world—now counted in billions—be led to rise up and declare they will tolerate war no longer? It is only a little more than fifty years since the need for such an uprising became evident. How can we expect such a sudden change in outlook and the formation and expression of the necessary resolve? In this perspective the attention claimed by peace movements around the world can be regarded as quite encouraging, even though we can hardly say they are likely to put an end to war

Yet they and we must try and try—this is the mood of some contributors to *Gandhi Marg*. Two of them, Rakesh Bharadwaj and Rajiv Vora, write on the difference between disarmament as government spokesmen and decision-makers see it, and as the people who are now joining popular movements see it. They say:

> The people have more at stake when they think and agitate for disarmament than have the States and their leaders when they talk of it. The positive assertion to *live,* and live without fear, is what moves the people in favour of disarmament, though unfortunately this assertion is not always matched by a desire to let other people live likewise. What makes the governmental leaders champion "SALTS," etc., is a necessity to license each other's arms and ammunition so that they can still scare their respective peoples into acquiescence.

Governments, in short, are willing to talk and confer about disarmament so long as they feel able to control the outcome of discussions. The writers examine the official view:

> What is it that disarmament enthusiasts aim at, apart of course from ensuring, as far as possible, that the doomsday for humankind is postponed, if not finally averted? There is no doubt (and the United Nations Report on Disarmament and Development further proves this) that the pith and substance of the disarmament movement is to further expand the industrial growth in the industrialized countries and to guarantee the increased modernization, the development of the developing countries by making modern industrial technology and the resources that would be released from disarmament to be even partially achieved, more easily accessible to them. That is to say that it is within the modern industrial parameters that the expected fruits of disarmament are to be adapted. It is not with this aim that we have our quarrel as much as with the naive expectation of

an equalitarian, nonexploitive, and harmonious world from such an adaptation.

> War is a dreadful thing. But what is still more dreadful are those forces, institutions, values, and lifestyles which make war inevitable. What use is the effort at stamping out the immediate nuclear war, only to fall back into the laps of such forces which generate and thrive on exploitation and violence, and which will therefore make us prepare for another war, maybe conventional, but surely on Third-World territory? . . . .
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> If the process of armaments is to be reversed (and this ought to be the proper ultimate logical aim of the movement for disarmament), then it is necessary that those ideas and institutions, which nurture, explain, and legitimize violence, are identified, understood, criticized, rejected, and finally replaced. It is precisely this to which the present disarmament movement is not addressing itself.

These writers point out that the New International Economic Order program adopted by the UN Assembly in 1974—and widely hailed as at last a conception of economic justice—sought the kind of "development" in the Third World which has made the advanced nations of the West what they are. In time past tools were used by society to assist in growth and progress, but the tools and systems of industrial technology *use society,* they actually consume it. The writers conclude:

> Lastly, it should be obvious to anyone that the leadership in the industrial countries is not opposed to war so much as it is scared of a *sudden* war. Indeed, they consider war not only as an effective but also as a legitimate means to realize their hegemonic ambitions. But they are very apprehensive and somewhat allergic to the possibilities of *war by accidents.* Their support to disarmament, therefore, is actually an attempt to *license* war; that is, to have an agreement on the ground rules of war. . . .

Governments, it becomes clear, are victims and creatures of habit—the habits of the past—much more than are ordinary people. If this is so, then papers and arguments and appeals concerning what governments "ought to do" to make peace are a waste of time, energy, and woodpulp. The people must remove from the power of government the capacity to plan and initiate war. If war is the health of the State, as Randolph Bourne declared more than sixty years ago, the time has come to allow only sickly and feeble states. States which dissolve slowly but surely into community.