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THE SELF AND ITS CIRCUMSTANCES

WHAT is the world? Is it a stockpile or a theater? A feedbin or a sanctuary?

People answer such questions according to what they believe to be their interests. Consumers need stockpiles and feedbins and little else. Adventurers require uncharted territory. A sanctuary is a protected place where transforming events may be solicited.

But what is the world apart from the opinions men have about it? Quite evidently, what we believe about the world depends upon what we think about ourselves, and our thoughts about ourselves may undergo changes. Is there, indeed, a source of information about the world, of knowledge independent of our preconceptions and suppositions? Discovering such a source seems unlikely, since we can't divorce the world from ourselves. Throughout the past, assumptions about the world have been reflections of assumptions about ourselves, and we have no reason to believe that any other way of thinking about the world is possible. It would follow, then, that if we can manage to make correct assumptions about ourselves, we may be able to find the right track for thinking about the world. This seems entirely reasonable, and there is hardly anything else to do.

One decision is required at the start: Are humans separate from the world or a part of it? The question may seem almost pointless, but people nonetheless make different answers to it and lead very different lives as a result. While we are obviously *in* the world, therefore in some sense part of it, we are also separate from it in the sense that we feel able to look at it and say what it is. We are subjects, and the world is our object, therefore separate from ourselves. The trouble is that, by being our object, the world gives our subjectivity its reality. It supplies us with something we see and think about, so that, even as a separate object, the world is a functional part of ourselves. We have our independent being as subjects because of the world. As Ortega said, "I am myself and my circumstances."

If we look to our own past we see that the conception of the world as separate from ourselves has long been the foundation of human behavior. This is as much a matter of feeling as of thought. The world as separate from us is the world as a "thing." A "thing" is not alive—not, at any rate, in the way that we are alive. Humans are pursuers of ends, fulfillers of hopes, achievers of goals. "Things," as we understand the term, don't have ends. They have no "being," but are simply there, available for use by the kinds of intelligence which pursue ends. While living things such as plants and animals exhibit purpose of a sort, their goals seem limited to mere self-perpetuation. We have not found it difficult to define plants and animals as classes of "things," adding them to the catalog of utilities supplied by the world.

Throughout the long modern period of regarding the world and its parts as "things," we put aside any serious questioning about ourselves. Learning how to use the world occupied virtually all our attention. We became, in our own view, expert definers of the world. We also became expert consumers of the world's stockpile of materials. Then, as some sort of climax to these developments, there was a resumption of man's thought about himself. It was natural for such experienced definers of things to apply their skills to human beings, converting them, little by little, into the sum of their "thing" characteristics. This became the modern way of establishing that we are not, after all, separate from the world, but part of it. We, too, are things, like everything else. We are somewhat complicated things, to be sure, but basically the same as all else in the world—things which can be defined, manipulated, put in their place and used as they are needed.

Defining the world as stockpile and feedbin and humans as consumers produced certain problems.

Arguing that since consumption is good, more consumption is better, people began consuming too much—far more than was necessary for comfortable survival. *Some* people, that is, consumed too much, while a great many others had barely enough. The solution seemed evident to the expert definers who were in charge: we need, they said, to produce a lot more of food and other things in order for everybody to have enough, or more than enough. Increase production, they said, and there will be no more hunger, no more disease, no more want anywhere in the world.

It didn't work. The stockpile wasn't big enough. The world, we were obliged to admit, is "finite." But meanwhile the expert producers had been making a great many dangerous and indigestible things. It became easy to kill, and easier to get sick. The wars between peoples, once enterprises in mere conquest, became desperate struggles for survival. The world of man, of modern man, lost its sense of secure well-being, and questions began to arise. Have we been making the wrong assumptions? Are human beings more than just consumers? Is the world something besides a stockpile of raw materials there for the taking?

Increasingly, it is pointed out that other ideas, other assumptions about human beings and the world, have always existed, surviving, so to speak, "underground." It has not been difficult for us to ignore those assumptions, to leave them uninspected. The language of consumers shuts them out. It has no words for the world as a place where great drama unfolds, no metaphors to enrich understanding of the longing for transcendence. But now vision and aspiration are reasserting themselves, and people are remembering the world as a once stately and respected place where heroic events might occur. Is it possible, they wonder, to make an altogether new beginning in our lives?

Where do fresh assumptions come from? They come only out of ourselves, our chastened scientists tell us, and if this is the meaning of our time—if new perspectives are becoming visible and changed attitudes are forming— then this new spirit will find increasingly explicit expression. An example may be found in the current issue of *Tract* (19-20), published quarterly in Wales, in "Ecological Humanism," by Henryk Skolimowski, who teaches philosophy at the University of Michigan. In this article, Prof. Skolimowski says:

> The universe is to be conceived as home for man. We are not insignificant dust residing in one obscure corner of the universe, but a cause, or at least a result of a most spectacular process in which all forces of the universe have cooperated. This is at once a dazzling and humbling prospect. For we are the custodians of the entire evolution and at the same time only the spear of the arrow of evolution. We should feel comfortable in this universe, for we are not an anomaly, but its crowning glory. We are not lost in it, or alienated from it, for *it is us.* . . .
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> The sacredness of man is the uniqueness of his biological constitution which is endowed with such refined potentials that it can attain spirituality. The sacredness of man is his conscious awareness of his spirituality and his inner compulsion to maintain it. The sacredness of man is the awareness of the enormous responsibility for the outcome of evolution, the evolution which has culminated in us but which has to be carried on. Man is, in a sense, only a vessel, but vested with such powers and responsibilities that he is a sacred vessel.
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> Our uniqueness does not stem from being separated from it all nor from "being the measure of all things in our own rights," as traditional humanists have maintained, but from beholding the most precious characteristics worked out by life at large, from being the custodians of the treasury of evolution. We have lost some of the grandeur and glory attributed to man by older humanist conceptions of man. But we have gained something of inestimable value: We are now in unity with the rest of the Cosmos, we are no longer alienated from it, we are part of the cycle, woven into the rest; and the rest is woven into us: brute atoms and half-conscious cells have cooperated in order to bring us about.
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> Unity with the rest does not mean stagnation or dissolution into the primordial matter. Far from it; for there is nothing tranquil in this unity. Evolution has been a Promethean drama through and through, abundant in sacrifice and Hubris. Our life has happened as the result of innumerable acts of transcendence, some of which were steeped in blood and sacrifice, both on the human level and on the pre-human level. *We give meaning to our life while attempting to transcend it.* Such is the story of

> preconscious life. And such is the story of life endowed with self-consciousness.

Is Prof. Skolimowski abandoning the scientific worldview? Yes and no. He holds to evolution as the primary reality in human life. He takes man as given, and he is given in our experience as a meaning-seeking being: transcendence is the realization of higher levels of meaning, more inclusive and more widely related stages of awareness. It is assumed that what man is today is not what he will be tomorrow. Prof. Skolimowski calls this Ecological Humanism—an "expression of Reason, of Reason in its evolutionary unfolding."

This suggests that, for the first time, Western thinkers are beginning to take evolution seriously in respect to *human* development. There is recognition that human evolution, whatever may have been its earlier stages, is not now biological: distinctively human development is intellectual and moral, not physical at all. Actually, the idea of non-physical evolution is now very much in the air. It is the subject of Theodore Roszak's last book, *Unfinished Animal*, and implicit in the assumptions of other writers. That the desire for self-knowledge is not a biological urge is a distinctive present-day recognition.

What has been our past, even our biological past? Much more, says Prof. Skolimowski, than chemistry plus reflex arcs, plus natural selection:

> The universe is again becoming a mysterious, fascinating place. Not only evolutionary biologists but also astro-physicists have been providing impressive insights and arguments showing that evolution—leading to the evolution of man— has not been a haphazard process. We are not just the result of blind permutations. Evolution has not been the stupid monkey that sits at the typewriter and, given infinite time, types out Shakespearean tragedies. Evolution has been something else—an exquisite series of compelling and mysterious transformations and transcendences. . . .
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> If evolution is conceived as the process of blind permutations, happening in the pre-eminently physio-chemical universe, then, at worst, evolution-centered values may mean the sanctification of the brutal and the merciless in the name of survival of the fittest; and, at best, they may mean a worship of inanimate Nature. However, if evolution is conceived as humanization and spiritualization of primordial matters, then the meaning of evolution in human terms spells out the meaning of human values. For values are those most refined aspects of human awareness, human dispositions and human aspirations which have made life extra-biological which have made life spiritual, thus human.

What central assumption has this writer made, which changes everything else? He assumes, and gives evidence for, the idea that all life, all evolution, is a movement toward greater *meaning*. This, he proposes, is the nature of both the world and man. Humans know this—or feel it, with opportunity to know it—and their work is to enlighten the world with this knowledge by appropriate means.

The world, then, is a global project in learning and awakening—evolution and transcendence. These are the processes devoted to the unfoldment of value, and if one stipulates these processes as primary, then looks at the world with them in mind, the world becomes a place of extraordinary possibilities instead of a vast inventory of "facts."

The world, Prof. Skolimowski suggests, can be recognized as the theater where the plot of a great drama is unfolding. The dynamics of the action are ethical:

> Altruism is a part of our nature, a part of human instinct. To recognize oneself as human is to recognize one's capacity for altruism. Societies which suppress altruism as a mode of social behavior end up torn with strife, like our present society. Moreover, altruism is an essential part of the nature of evolution. Evolution would long ago have come to a halt if it were not endowed with altruism as its modus operandi. This truth is slowly being recognized by the most recent research in biology and sociobiology. Edward Wilson persuasively demonstrates, in his *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, that there are forms of behavior to be seen among bees, ants, baboons and other species which, from the human point of view, must be recognized as altruistic. However, Wilson undermines his thesis and his examples by attempting to find "a more conventional biological explanation" for this behavior, that is, the explanation which avoids any use of transcendence. But evolution *is* a process of transcendence. One does not even begin to understand what "altruistic behavior" might mean, if one is confined to conventional biological

> explanation. What may appear as idealism in human terms (altruism) is stark realism in evolution's terms. Evolution without cooperation of its component parts would be null and void. . . . All those theories of aggression which revel in the apparently destructive nature of man and which are purportedly based on evolution, seem to be quite oblivious of the work evolution has done through its altruism. It is not asserted here that aggression is not part of our heritage, but only that altruism has prevailed and will prevail, because it is in the nature of evolution. We could not live one single day, even in the meanest of societies, without altruistic behavior occurring all the time.

It is indeed time that someone pointed this out. But where, then, does "aggression" come from? A reasonable account of aggression would be that it is the predisposition of all intelligence that is convinced—whether consciously or by instinct—that it is separate and apart from other forms of life, and that its good becomes possible only at the cost of theirs.

Well, this is theory—a flight of the mind. And Prof. Skolimowski, it will be said, is writing, not about the world as it is, but as it conceivably might be, or as we would like it to be. Don't we have to deal with the world as it is, full of mistrust, hostility, and acts of aggression?

But what is meant by "the world as it is"? The world in the morning is different from the world at dusk. A seed is not a tree. The first crude embodiment of a new idea may suggest little or nothing of what, under development, it may become. When Michael Faraday showed the first model of the dynamo he had invented to Sir Robert Peel, the British Prime Minister asked what use it had. Faraday is said to have replied, "I know not, but I wager that one day your government will tax it." Or, as another version puts it, Faraday said, "What use has a new-born babe?"

Evolution conceived as Transcendence means that any present includes potentiality as a part of what is. An egg is infinitely more than a rock. And if evolution is the unfolding of Reason—not only a matter of the proliferation and specialization of cells—then it may be necessary for us to *think* it on its way. Prof. Skolimowski concludes his essay:

> Immanuel Kant has asked: "What is man?" His intent was not to describe human nature as it is, as it can be found by empirical surveys, but rather to discover the full scope of the human potential.
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> Goethe has said, as if answering Kant's question:
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> "To treat man as he is, is to debase him;
> To treat man as he ought to be, is to engrace him."
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> To fulfill the human potential is to transcend our present condition, is to fulfill the requirement of evolution, is to adopt the idiom of frugality which is a precondition of inner beauty, is to assure our short term and long term survival. Our immediate and long term biological and environmental survival depends entirely upon our capacity to remake the world from within. Transcendental-evolutionary values are nowadays the expression of the historical necessity. To reach beyond is the evolutionary imperative, and it is the imperative of our present condition. Moreover, we have to reach beyond in order not to be swept away from where we are. The transcendent and the urgent are one.

What would happen to the way people think and to what they do, as a result of adopting this outlook? Well, we would still be in charge of the world, but as conservators, no longer demanding consumers. We could then withdraw Auden's label for our time—"The Age of Anxiety"—and put in its place a better name, the Age of Stewardship. Gandhi might have suggested calling it the Age of Trusteeship. In this view the world is no longer a stockpile, but a garden, a theater, and a sanctuary, a place of drama and transcendence. Finally, we would think of learning, of knowledge, not as a listing of resources and the techniques for making things, but—as Skolimowski puts it—"as ever more subtle devices for helping us to maintain our spiritual and physical equilibrium, and enabling us to attune ourselves to further creative transformation of evolution and of ourselves."

REVIEW
THE ANCIENT BECOMES THE MODERN

WE speak from time to time of the "plateaus" reached in the struggle toward a better life, showing that a new point of view has gained diverse strengths, yet with symmetry, balance, and the power of concerted expression. Richard Merrill's *Radical Agriculture,* reviewed here a few weeks ago, seemed good evidence of the achievement of such a plateau in relation to food production.

Something similar could—and should—be said about Huston Smith's new book, *Forgotten Truth* (Harper & Row, 1976, $8.95), which suggests that the thought of Western man has at last climbed out of the trough-like confinements of the nineteenth-century world-view. This freeing achievement is represented by new reference-points of reality: Mind and the human spirit come first, with subsequent appropriate attention to the facts of material existence. One has the feeling that human beings may now be able to begin living their lives right-side up without having to go directly against the grain of their age. The age, in short, is changing. A new way of thinking, feeling, and looking at life is slowly being established. This, at any rate, is a conclusion that seems fairly staked out by Huston Smith.

No one, we think, is better equipped to give an account of the seminal ideas which have made this great change possible. Dr. Smith was for years professor of philosophy at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (he now teaches religion and philosophy at Syracuse University), and is best known to the general reader as author of *The Religions of Man.* He combines intellectual rigor with warmth and friendliness, appealing, therefore, to a very large audience. In this book he takes his readers on a journey to some high elevations—beyond the point, it may be, where the dirigibility of some will enable them to follow, yet one may feel that he might rise along with the writer if he would just toss overboard a sandbag or two.

What, actually, does this book do? It addresses minds, encouraging use of the mind's powers in ways that transcendent nature apparently intended. The task is metaphysical—the use of reason freed of its peonage to the only-matter-is-real dogma—and the intention is to come to grips with the full range of human experience, by exercising the mind's capacity to distinguish the content of each level in that range, in terms of the sense of *meaning* possessed by all humans. Although the author defines science (the scientific method) as being unable to take cognizance of values—incapable of deciding what is *good* (above the instrumental level)—it seems entirely possible that the way this book is written will help to establish some of the ground rules for a science that deals with the ranges of subjective reality.

Objective science is the study of the world. Subjective science is the study of the beings in the world—including those who do the studying. The two have in common the pursuit of certainty or truth, but the resemblance stops there, save, possibly, for some formal parallels. Objective science seeks limiting definition of finite realities within the framework of time and space. Subjective science attempts to track the movement and flights of awareness (consciousness) past the signposts of diminishing objectivity—or its upward passage through grades of increasing unity—to the point where, at last, nothing can or remains to be said. The virtue of Dr. Smith's book is that it enables the reader to increase his feeling of the reality of this inner quest. The search, the path, is *substantial,* although not material; the goal is not fanciful, even if indefinable; the reason for pursuing it seems given at the moment of birth, or perhaps before.

In a curious and not inappropriate way, this book may be compared with Tom Paine's *Common Sense.* Whatever he said there—and he said a lot—Paine's main purpose was to generate in his readers the feeling of self-confidence, of

competence and right in self-government. You are able to do it, he said; you *ought* to do it; and you'll be better off if you do. Paine believed this of his countrymen, but instead of trying to "prove" it to them, he made its reality so vivid that they could recognize it for themselves. The "arguments" were an accompanying rhetoric, necessary, perhaps, but far from sufficient. The people needed to *see* it, and logic only removes some of the obstacles to seeing.

Dr. Smith doesn't argue that man is essentially a spiritual and mind being; he assumes it, being himself convinced that it is true. The book gets the reader used to this idea; the familiarity is needed before one can think about it, decide what sense it makes of areas that are still dark and mysterious.

The subtitle of the book is "The Primordial Tradition," indicating the archaic teaching of meaning as it emerges in all the levels of reality—the hierarchical view. This tradition is the foundation of the philosophical religions, and of ancient science in the sense of Pythagoras and Plato as scientists. Modern science flattened the hierarchies of meaning down to a single level—physical matter. The idea was, by relying on precise measurement of objective things, to put an end to bewilderment, subtlety, confusion, priestly deception, and self-deception. It was a heroic endeavor—but Faustian rather than Promethean, Procrustean rather than Olympian—and it didn't work. Or rather, it worked so brilliantly for a time that it blinded very nearly all mankind. Now we must learn to go back to past forms of thinking, learning the ways and terms of hierarchy; we must discover the uses of ambiguity, see the significance of octaves of meaning and of subtle correspondences, and, finally, persuade ourselves that there are appropriate disciplines for thinking well in all these modes.

Dr. Smith uses the late Wilder Penfield's remarkable study, *The Mystery of the Mind*, to establish that mind is a real entity, not a mere epiphenomenon, then talks about our minds as we experience them:

> The "feel" of mind as we encounter it awake is so familiar that we overlook the mystery it parades in broad daylight. For on the one hand it truly reaches the physical world and no philosophical artifice can convince us of the contrary; meanwhile it consists of nothing but a tissue of images conditioned by what our senses can pick up, our interests induce them to pick up, and our past experience feeds in by ways of interpretations that elicit expectations. Everything that constitutes for us the world—its brute stubbornness, its continuity, its logical coherence—is a flow of phantasms, a gossamer of Berkeleian impressions. It is futile to try to know the world outside this magic lantern show since it comes to us only through its "slides."

Yet *we* are there, behind it all, looking at the show, absorbing it, generalizing about it—and that "we" is no insubstantial, imaginary thing. This same "we" moves through various experiences; as passive spectators we dream, so that other ranges of spectacle, with ourselves modified as witnesses, come to us every night.

Dr. Smith reviews other avenues of consciousness:

> Between wakefulness and dreaming lies the twilight zone of daydream. Phenomenologists could dub in a whole landscape here, filled with phantasms that belie by their insubstantiality the power they exert over us. We will forgo the tour of this interface and touch instead on a final way we might catch a glimpse of the mind at work. If discarnates can indeed report through mediums their experiences after death, these reports would testify to the mind in an exceptionally pristine condition, a state totally unimplicated in the corporeal world. Such reports should be approached with great suspicion, for the "controls" in question are not integrated souls or even integrated minds, they consist at most of "psychic residues" that minds leave in their wake as they traverse the psychic plane. When our bodies break up under the heavy years and our souls proceed toward eternity, superfluous fragments of our personalities may float on for a while like small lost rafts on the psychic sea.

What, according to Dr. Smith, is the real identity?

> The soul is the final locus of our individuality. Situated as it were behind the senses, it sees through the eyes without being seen, hears with the ears without itself being heard. Similarly it lies deeper than mind. If we equate mind with the stream of consciousness, the soul is the source of this stream; it is also its witness while never itself appearing within the stream as a datum to be observed. It underlies, in fact, not only the flux of mind but all the changes through which an individual passes; it thereby provides the sense in which these changes can be considered to be *his*. . . . To try to get the "I" into the field of vision is like trying to see my eyes by stepping back a pace; with every backward move I make, it retreats correlatively. But though the "me" is the only part of myself I can objectify, I sense it to be the object of a subject that is its source and superior.
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> This superior is the soul. . . . In the faint glimpses of itself that the soul affords us, it appears less as a thing than as a movement; to paraphrase Nietzsche, it resembles a bridge more than a destination. Restlessness is built into it as a metaphysical principle. And though its reachings often seem random, they have a direction.
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> What is this direction?
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> Ever since man appeared on this planet he seems to have been searching for an object that he could love, serve, and adore wholeheartedly; an object which, being of the highest and most permanent beauty and perfection, would never permit his love for it to dwindle, deteriorate, or suffer frustration. The search has led to difficulties.

The inner experience of human life seems a strange combination of longing with feelings of inadequacy, even futility. The sense of high capacity is locked in embrace with finite limitation, leading to cynicism in some, angry nihilism in others, fortunately a few. Were it not for the presence in historical recollection—more memorably, perhaps, in legend and myth—of men who seemed undiscouraged by such contradictions, and who embodied certain recurring ideas in the doctrines of the great religions, ordinary humanity would surely remain without hope. In bringing to his readers his understanding of some of these ideas—which he calls the primordial tradition—Dr. Smith suggests that the time has come to look once more at ancient mysteries.

A mystery, we sometimes suppose, out explanation. Its original meaning, however, was that it may become a principle of explanation. A person's mystery—in the case of an artisan, the knowledge of his art—was the secret of his strength. Its obscurity resulted from the impossibility of easy transfer of his knowledge to anyone else. He might inspire, but he could not "teach." The technique is not the mystery. Yet, quite reasonably, those who have been able to inspire others are called teachers, by reason of their influence, which seems to spread by some sort of "field" rather than by communication.

Dr. Smith, one could say, is engaged in the restoration of the "field" which was the environment of self-discovery in the antique world. That human beings have in themselves the *capacity* for self-discovery may be the "mystery" involved. That we are neither "miserable sinners" nor blobs of animated matter—conceptions of self that lead to dependency and depression—but foci uniting the realities of two worlds, the inner and outer, seems the heart of the matter.

COMMENTARY
VOICES OF EXPERIENCE

IN this week's "Children" Eliot Wigginton is quoted as saying that until a young person gains some self-confidence he will not be able to "move beyond himself to an unselfish caring about others." This seems fundamental. Competence enables a person to stop worrying about himself. It may also lead to conceit, but after people have learned to do things well they at least have some freedom in moral decision.

A comparison of Wigginton's four levels with Lawrence Kohlberg's six stages of moral development (see "Children" for Jan. 19) might prove interesting. There wouldn't be one-to-one correspondences, but the suggestive parallels might be many.

Concerning his highest level—called Independence—Wigginton says: "At this level, the student should be nearly out of our hands—beyond us—for this is the exit phase, the point at which he looks toward the future instead of backward to us for hand-holding and advice." He gives this illustration:

> Sandy Jeranko, until recently the advisor to *Sea Chest*, a magazine off the coast of North Carolina, tells of two students of hers. One chose to stay on the island to claim his birthright and help chart and influence its future, and the other chose to leave after studying the community carefully and weighing what it had to offer his future. The point she makes is a good one: it doesn't matter that the decisions were opposites, or that she "failed" to get one student to stay and fight that area's problems. What matters is that both the students exercised informed, intelligent, carefully weighed *choice*, and that both went into the world as sounder, fuller more positive human beings because of the experiences they had with her and her project.

Kohlberg's highest level—Stage Six—includes those who make their moral decisions entirely on the basis of self-reference, yet, as Kohlberg says, at Stage Six "principles are not only principles for me and my group, they are universal; they are guides to moral choices for all mankind."

The value of these approaches to education and moral development seems obvious enough. By using them teachers acquire patience fortified by understanding; moralizing drops to a minimum; and, throughout, students free themselves by becoming self-dependent at each stage.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
MOMENTS AND "CLICKS"

REVIEWING books on teaching is a chore mainly because so few books are really *about* teaching, probably because writing about teaching is the next thing to impossible. Now we have a glorious exception—*Moments,* by Eliot Wigginton, the man who is at the heart of the *Foxfire* project at the Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School in Georgia. (The price is $3.95 and the best way to get it would probably be to write the publisher, modestly known as IDEAS, 1785 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.)

It is our habit, when reading a book for review, to mark lightly in the margin passages that seem especially quotable, listing the page numbers on the back endsheet. This saves time and may be useful years later, when we go back to the book for some reason, as we often do. The method is a good one but it doesn't work with Wigginton's *Moments.* By the time we got to page there were marks on nearly every page. Fortunately, the first sixteen pages explain the character of the book, with the rest devoted to illustration—rich, colorful, enjoyable examples of the experiences the members of Wigginton's high-school journalism class encounter while they are working with him.

He wrote this book because of what happened as a result of the enormous success of the *Foxfire* project—the magazine he and his students started ten or eleven years ago. Briefly, they foraged and mined the skills and capacities of the older people living in that part of the country, making an intensely interesting magazine with what they found out. So the book has two reasons:

> First, a mounting flood of letters that say, essentially, "We've heard about your project and would like to do the same thing here in our school in Utah. Would you please tell us what the project is all about, how you got started, and what we need to know to do it here?"
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> Second, my own firsthand knowledge of an increasing number of misunderstandings about, and hence bastardizations and misapplications of, the underlying philosophy behind the *Foxfire* idea. I don't care what positive wrinkles or alterations are made in terms of projects or products or methods—I welcome these variations; but if it's going to be called a *Foxfire*-type project, and that label is going to be used to attract financial and/or administrative support, I'd at least like the basic philosophy, with its emphasis on process rather than product, to shine through clean and unimpaired by ego, greed or stupidity. Perhaps I ask too much, but when I walk into a school and am shown their *Foxfire* project, and it turns out to be indistinguishable from their ancient history course, I cannot help but become disillusioned and angered.

One of the main reasons for the success of *Foxfire* is that the students feel that they are really doing something. That is the value of the project's "product."

> I feel [Eliot Wigginton says] that some sort of end product (magazine, newspaper, television show, radio program) is a valuable conclusion to kids' activities because it forces them through the discipline of working their material into communicable form, and also sets them up for reactions and praise from an audience they weren't even aware existed. Knowing that something is going to *happen* to their work is one of the most powerful motivations around. Their work is not going to be dropped into some black hole never to be seen again, or never to be commented upon in the form of that hopelessly inadequate tool we have known as the grade. It is important. It is going to be used. You care about it. It *matters.*

Now comes the other side—the qualification:

> But far too often (and I can give specific examples) in the desire to create a superlative product, the teacher hand-picks those few superior students who can produce and doesn't allow the others to get involved. The end product is often impressive but the kids that could have benefited the most from this kind of activity were ignored (as usual) and lost. A *Foxfire* activity is ideally suited for those poor kids who have gotten stimulation reward and a sense of achievement nowhere else. Kids that can't write well (yet) can conduct magical interviews

> or take brilliant photographs—and later find themselves writing captions and descriptions to go with them. Kids that don't read well (yet) can make wonderful videotapes and films and slide shows—and later find themselves reading and writing scripts. Kids that have been led to feel that the workaday world out there bears no relation to their school suddenly find something that refutes that, and they blossom. I'm pretty sure of this. I've watched it happen for nine years.

In nine years you get a few nice little miracles:

> One of the most difficult students we worked with—a girl who almost dropped out in the tenth grade—had withdrawn from those around her because of constant criticism for the fact that she always wore bluejeans to school. Then we took the time to find out that she wore jeans because her mother still washed her clothes with lye soap in an iron pot filled with boiling water, and jeans were the only clothing that could take that kind of punishment. We had her work on an article about washing clothes that way, and we published it, and she began to open up. As a senior, with failing grades in English in the past, she sold a story to *Seventeen* for $400.00, and she walked about for days with the money, in cash, in her pocket—holding it.

The book is really about the "moments" when good things happen for children—when they see something they hadn't seen before, when their eyes open to a new possibility, when they grow so fast you can almost see them shoot up. That is, it is about the background in which these things take place, and something about why the background invites the moments and then multiplies their promise. As Wigginton puts it:

> We, as teachers, never know what "clicks" are going to happen with which kids at what instants of time. We operate, often, in ignorance. But my feeling is that these "moments" of awakening are essential to the process of moving a kid out of himself and into the world of man. Until his own ego is satisfied, and until he knows he has worth as an individual and has been recognized by others as having worth, he cannot move beyond himself to an unselfish caring about others. He cannot become whole, able to make choices and exercise those options that are open to himself in a positive way.

Thinking about an experience with one student, Wigginton got the idea of making a checklist of the conditions, the circumstances, the mental surroundings which seem to be present when the "moments" occur:

> Here, then, is my stab in the direction of a checklist. I'm not telling you *how* to make these things happen. That's up to you and your own approach. What I am saying is that if you use this and somehow make many of these things happen for many of your kids, you'll increase the possibilities of coming closer to helping them be fuller, happier, more competent adults. . . .
>
> The moments are arranged on four levels. This is an acceptable logic for moving a kid from self-centeredness to a caring about the world, but it is not a true logic. You will find, as I do, for example, that you'll have a kid on your hands who in some ways is already doing things at level three or four, but has yet to have a number of level one activities hit him. In reality, there is a constant movement between the levels and this must be acknowledged. Nevertheless, the moments themselves can be roughly grouped according to complexity and sophistication. Learning to use a camera or print a photograph is less complex (and initially more self-indulgent) than helping to create a piece of legislation for a community that will better the plight of many of its citizens.
>
> As you look at the moments, you will see that folklore [the *Foxfire* content] does not have to be the vehicle. A perfectly good project utilizing all the following activities [described in the rest *of Moments*] might be a community magazine that talked not about the past but the present. . . .

Next come accounts of what has been done at the various levels and how it worked.

FRONTIERS

Mayhem in Review

THE editor of *Harper's*, Lewis H. Lapham, who now conducts "The Easy Chair," may have made a contribution of some importance (in his December issue) with a casual gathering of evidence that the people of the United States seem bent on self-destruction. The impressive thing about this evidence is its variety.

> What other country in the world [asks Mr. Lapham] could make a folk hero out of Evel Knievel? Or proclaim Chris Burden an artist because he had the wit to crucify himself on a Volkswagen? . . .
>
> The genius for self-destruction shows up in so many other ways that I sometimes think that the United States, despite the well-known rhetoric to the contrary, bears a grudge against the very idea of a future. I tend to make connections between random or miscellaneous events, and so when I read about the infant mortality rate in Chicago or New York, I think about violence at the movies. When I read about the poisonous chemicals flowing into the James River or pass by slag heaps or wrecked automobiles, I think of 8 million people unable to find work or the enormous numbers of school-children who cannot expect to receive an education. The waste of people corresponds to the waste of every other known resource. I find further correspondences between the national levels of drug addiction and the murderous self-delusion of the Vietnam war, between 50,000 people killed every year in traffic accidents and the American investment in the international arms trade (roughly $32 billion between 1965 and 1974), and between the number of suicides among citizens aged fifteen to twenty-four (up by about 250 per cent in the past generation) and the richness of the market in pornographic fantasy. . . . The Watergate investigations, recriminations of the last four years have come to constitute a subdivision of the entertainment industry. . .

He concludes:

> I notice that the statisticians report an abrupt increase in the incidence of suicide and child abuse in the week before Christmas each year. Mr. Nixon and Mr. Kissinger no doubt had their reasons for bombing North Vietnam, but it occurs to me to wonder why they ordered the raid on Christmas Eve. In a country possessed of a thermonuclear arsenal, it is a mistake to believe in fairy tales. The citizens of that country can conquer their aggressions, perhaps transforming them into music or architecture, but they do themselves great harm if they pretend that the aggressions don't exist.

The really horrifying thing about this brief diagnosis is the ease with which another one like it could be put together. Mr. Lapham had little or no "research" to do to fill his space.

If one collected only such material one would be forced to conclude that Nathaniel West's *Day of the Locust* had indeed arrived. In the *Saturday Review* for last November 27 John Neary tells the story of J. Anthony Morris, a research scientist who has been fired from the federal Bureau of Biologics by the Food and Drug Commissioner because he called the swine-flu vaccine unscientific and dangerous. Morris's job was to determine the safety of vaccines for the protection of the public. Apparently an effective researcher, he found "a long-term relationship between measles vaccine and a hideous brain disease of children," and similar connections between fatal ills and other vaccines. He made further disturbing discoveries about vaccines for influenza, one of them producing cancer in mice, and could find no merit in the preparation used in the government's massive vaccination program, declaring, as reported by the *SR* writer, plenty of evidence "that the risk of taking the swine-flu vaccine is great for children, old people, and pregnant women and that the hazards of a crash production program are abundant." So he was fired for "insubordination and inefficiency." Questioned about the government program, he said:

> When you ask, "Why do they make this useless damned vaccine?" *that* involves millions of dollars, and they are not going to shut that source of revenue off—until they get something to take its place.

Another *SR* article in the same issue examines vaccines in general. The writer, Richard Restak, remarks that "some current vaccines pose more of a threat to our health than the diseases they are supposed to prevent." He quotes James Turner,

author of the Nader study, *The Chemical Feast*, as saying:

> Rather than using a scalpel, we're using a meat cleaver. Instead of well-thought-out programs aimed at the fewest possible people, we're pumping vaccines into millions who don't need them. If this trend continues, people are going to stop taking *all* vaccines.

In an article in *Working Papers* (Summer, 1976), Paul Starr calls this mood "Therapeutic Nihilism." After some review of Ivan Illich's *Medical Nemesis* and an account of the benighted practices of nineteenth-century medicine in the United States, the writer says:

> The therapeutic nihilism of the nineteenth century had its justification in objective fact. We now know that it was correct: most medical treatment of the day was absolutely useless. Much of it—the bleeding, blistering, and purging of patients—was lethal. By helping to rid medicine of such techniques, therapeutic nihilism contributed to the liberation of medicine from the dead hand of the past. Today, medical institutions are often as ineffective as specific treatments were then. Perhaps the new therapeutic nihilism, which questions the medical system in its totality, will have the same liberating effect.

If anyone wonders why this mood should be spreading, a look at a recent paperback, *Prescription Drugs and Their Side Effects* (Grosset & Dunlap, 1975) by Edward L. Stern, will lay a foundation for understanding. This book is called a guide to "the 150 most frequently prescribed drugs as tabulated by the New York State Board of Pharmacy." Another small but enlightening volume would be *The Riddle of Heart Attacks* by Broda O. Barnes, M.D. (Robinson Press, Inc., Fort Collins, Colo. 80522, $2.50).

These articles and books are concerned with what we do about human health. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* for Nov. 17 is equally critical of what we do "on the farm" in behalf of plant health. In condensed summary, this story says:

> A University of California entomologist charged that the use of farm pesticides in the state today is "wastefully inefficient, excessively pollutive and inexcusably hazardous to human health."
>
> "The fundamental flaw in our campaign against the insects is that we have opted for chemical control," Dr. Robert van den Bosch said, "which was doomed to failure from its inception because the insects simply are too diverse, adaptable and prolific to be beaten by such a simplistic approach."
>
> "Pest control advisement is overwhelmingly controlled by the agrichemical industry," he said, "whose salesmen total approximately 2,300 of California's 2,700 licensed pest control advisers.
>
> "These salesmen, representing perhaps as many as 100 companies, are locked in fierce competitive battle for their share of the agricultural market, which inevitably leads to pesticide overuse."

This is a large subject with much more to be said, but such abuses have become so evident that professional scientists are speaking out. The disclosures by Prof. van den Bosch were made at a California senate hearing at Sacramento before a committee which took testimony from farm workers made ill by contact with pesticides used in the fields.

Obviously, countless changes need to be made in the way we live our lives, and also in the sources we look to for counsel.