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AFTER THE AGE OF REVOLUTION

IS it possible for an age to "understand itself," or is this phrase mostly a sign of confused thinking? One justifying comment might be that we inevitably think about matters bearing crucially on human affairs, culture, and civilization in this way. We can hardly do anything else. The moment we leave behind personal concerns, individual philosophies, and private solutions to investigate common problems, we speak of "the age" as if it represented some great, collective individual. No doubt a unity of some sort exists among the people of a memorable time; the fact that we are able to write intelligibly of Periclean Athens, fifteenth-century Florence, Elizabethan England, or the Founding period of the United States is evidence that we think that the best and the most articulate men may be regarded as speaking for their "time." If we did not allow ourselves to do this it would be impossible to say much of importance about historical epochs.

Two rather different writers of our own time Aldous Huxley and Ortega y Gasset—have taken note of the particular distinction of those who qualify as "spokesmen" for their age. Ortega wrote of individuals who live "at the height of their times," meaning that these are the ones who give their age its character, provide some illumination of its events, and exercise a shaping influence on its opinions. In one of his later essays, Huxley distinguished between those few who occupy themselves with comprehending their time, acting to change or improve it, and those who are swept along by the passage of events, living, so to say, beneath the surface of things.

An analogy may ease this way of looking at human differences. The course of history, with its succession of great events, resembles the acts of a drama. The leading players claim our attention because they are the "doers" of the play. The actors in supporting roles are necessary, since every figure we look at needs a ground to set it off, but it is the protagonists who make the play, who stand for what is really happening. For democratic justification we may say to ourselves that in some other drama, the youth who carries a spear or the maid who dusts the library will have a leading role, but it remains a fact that at a given moment the "hero" (or the "villain") claims our closest attention, for only his decisions and behavior unfold what the play is *about.*

If we reject this outlook as "elitism," declaring that the masses are more important than leading figures, then, as the consequences of this choice unfold, we may find ourselves overtaken by a muddy flow of incomprehensible happenings, with interpretation lost in a sea of "data" which has no recognizable shape. Likewise, a social movement which affirms particular, concrete goals, requiring careful plans and action, yet which insists upon being "unstructured" in behalf of "participatory politics," usually assumes the form anonymously determined by manipulators, or it falls apart. It seems to be a law of nature that human and any other sort of energy cannot flow without the focus provided by structures which are hierarchical in the arrangement and function of their parts. The question is, what sort of leadership provides a focus which serves the best interests of all? Will you choose a Jefferson or a Robespierre?

With this apology, then, for allowing a small number of thinkers and actors to stand for entire epochs of history, we turn to the period in which we live. Has our time a distinctive character? How will it be remembered by historians of a thousand years hence?

The question, of course, has a certain futility. Every age—every period with enough distinction to be called an "age"—rewrites the history of the

past. Right now, for example, we are recomposing the history of antiquity. That is, we are beginning to regard ancient thinkers, religious teachers, philosophers, and perhaps ancient scientists with new respect. Leading historians such as Giorgio de Santillana, scholars of religion and philosophy such as Huston Smith, cultural anthropologists, among them Claude Lvi-Strauss and Stanley Diamond (and doubtless others), are looking at the past with fresh eyes and chastened spirits. They are saying quite openly that in the works and thought of ancient and supposedly "primitive" peoples they are finding an unparalleled light on ourselves. This, they maintain, is the real reason for studying the past—to get a light on ourselves that neither our science, our religion, nor our politics seems able to provide.

Can we perhaps say, then, that our epoch is a time when eminent thinkers are pursuing no concrete goal, striving for no visible achievement, but are concentrating on what we may openly call self-knowledge? Our best men are certainly not in the Church: they are not spending their energies to create temporal power for a vast religious institution that promises salvation. Nor are they empire-builders like Warren Hastings or Cecil Rhodes, or industrialists like Henry Ford. They are not even scientists, although science has left an ineffaceable mark on the modern mind. For a time it seemed as though the most illustrious individuals of our century would be self-sacrificing healers and helpers—humanitarians concerned with vast salvage operations—and this is work which continues in the present, in which Albert Schweitzer was a pioneer. The attractions of such activity need no explanation, since in the twentieth century our world began to reap the whirlwind, the inevitable harvest, we might say, of what are now obvious mistakes of the past.

But why, in addition to this, do so many undertakings that once seemed fine, great, and promising turn to dust and ashes? Why does nearly everything external we touch, these days, go so wrong? Is it that we have extraordinary power to do what we choose on impulse, with little understanding of what is good to do? What is the governing principle of our behavior, if one exists? Which is to ask: Have we almost wholly misunderstood the nature of man, and is this the reason why our achievements are so filled with well-nigh fatal contradictions?

This is the question, then, that is beginning to identify our time—the early years of an age in which self-understanding will have the highest priority among human enterprises. It is now, of course, a search represented by a mere handful in comparison with the general population, but also an inquiry everywhere reflected in partial ways; wherever there is seriousness of thought one detects this tone of inner wondering. Even its vulgarizations have some importance, since only strong ideas can be exploited in this way.

Thinking about the self is thinking about thinking. We cannot really "think" about the self, the pure subject, but only about its instruments—how they work, what they reflect, and what they hide. So the inner dialogue of thinking about thinking is the closest we can come to understanding ourselves in communicable terms.

How shall we relate this idea to what people commonly believe to be going on in this part of the century? Well, among those who make an attempt to understand the time, a current of thought that occupies great attention is the idea of Revolution. What or how do we think about revolution?

It should be useful, first, to place the conception historically. In *On Revolution* Hannah Arendt shows that it is really a modern idea, separating our age from antiquity. Revolution establishes an earthly goal apart from individual spiritual realization:

> Obviously the secularity of the world and the worldliness of men in any given age can best be measured by the extent to which preoccupation with the future of the world takes precedence in men's minds over preoccupation with their own ultimate

> destiny in a hereafter. Hence, it was a sign of the new age's secularity when even very religious people desired not only a government which would leave them free to work out their individual salvation but wished "to establish a government . . . more agreeable to the dignity of human nature . . . and to transmit such a government down to their posterity with the means of securing and preserving it forever." This, at any rate, was the deepest motive which John Adams ascribed to the Puritans, and the extent to which even the Puritans were no longer mere pilgrims on earth but "Pilgrim Fathers"—founders of colonies with their stakes and claims not in the hereafter but in this world of mortal men.

This is central to the idea of revolution. Its declared intention is to realize the Heavenly City on earth. The revolution, men hoped and believed, would create social institutions embodying the dream of a society which enabled all to exercise "the inherent and unalienable rights of man." What then *is* Revolution? At root it is an act of faith—the firm belief that humans have the capacity to legislate a Vision, to create a constitution and a social order that will give enduring form to the hardly matured ideas and unsatisfied longings of the revolutionary spirit. But in the case of "successful" revolutions, the very act of adapting the constitutional forms to the realities of human nature, in order to give permanence to the revolutionary intentions, brought unresolved contradictions, not dealt with in the dream, down to earth in practical confrontation. As Hannah Arendt puts it, speaking of the American Revolution:

> The failure of post-revolutionary thought to remember the revolutionary spirit and to understand it conceptually was preceded by the failure of the revolution to provide it with a lasting institution. The revolution, unless it ended in the disaster of terror, had come to an end with the establishment of a republic which, according to the men of the revolution, was "the only form of government which is not at open or secret war with the rights of mankind." But in this republic, as it presently turned out, there was no space reserved, no room left for the exercise of precisely those qualities which had been instrumental in building it. And this was clearly no mere oversight, as though those who knew so well how to provide for power of the commonwealth and the liberties of its citizens, for judgment and opinion, for interests and rights, had simply forgotten what actually they cherished above everything else the potentialities of action and the proud privilege of being beginners of something altogether new. Certainly they did not want to deny this privilege to their successors, but they also could not very well wish to deny their own work, although Jefferson, more concerned with this perplexity than anybody else, almost went to this extremity.

How did Jefferson risk this? Well, after Shay's rebellion he exclaimed, "God forbid we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion," adding that "the tree of liberty must be refreshed, from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants." But the tenure of this conviction in Jefferson's mind was brief. He voiced no such sentiments after the horrors of the French Revolution, which broke out two years later, altering his view to the conception that there should be opportunity for constitutional revisions at regular intervals.

> In other words, what he wished to provide for was an exact repetition of the whole process of action which had accompanied the course of the Revolution, and while in his earlier writings he saw this action primarily in terms of liberation, in terms of the violence that had preceded and followed the Declaration of Independence, he later was much more concerned with constitution-making and the establishment of a new government, that is, with those activities which by themselves constituted the space of freedom.

What did the Founding Fathers concern themselves with, mainly, in their constitution-making? The practical problem, as they saw it, was representation of the people. How would it work? What arrangement would be both just and practical? They were concerned, also, with checks and balances not only on the power of legislators and officials, but also on the whims and passions of the populace:

> Popular and learned opinion are agreed that the two absolutely new institutional devices of the American republic, the Senate and the Supreme Court, represent the most "conservative" factors in the body politic, and no doubt they are right. The question is only whether that which made for stability

> and answered so well the early modern preoccupation with permanence was enough to preserve the spirit which had become manifest during the Revolution itself. Obviously this was not the case.

The course of the Revolution in France was very different. There ruthless power was assumed to be the natural instrument for converting the revolutionary Dream into political fact. Serious differences of opinion would be settled by the decisive fall of the guillotine's knife. The revolutionary rhetoric which elevated Robespierre to power held the "will of the people" sacred and all powerful, declared the rights of the downtrodden poor the sole arbiter of revolutionary decision. Weak and compromising "reason" would be compelled to give way to compulsive acts in behalf of the masses. The voice of the people would be heard, their needs fulfilled, their rights enacted into law. The popular clubs and societies which gave the revolution its cadres were held by Robespierre to be the very embodiment of the emancipating spirit of the age. They were "the people" in action. These were Robespierre's principles, but as Hannah Arendt says, in practice he "substituted an irresistible and anonymous stream of violence for the free and deliberate actions of men." In the summer of '93, when he gained power, he completely reversed his position:

> Now it was he who fought relentlessly against what he chose to name "the so-called popular societies" and invoked against them "the great popular Society of the whole French people," one and indivisible. The latter, alas, in contrast to the small popular societies of artisans or neighbors, could never be assembled in one place. . . . Actually Robespierre needed no great theories but only a realistic evaluation of the course of the Revolution to come to the conclusion that the Assembly hardly had any share in its more important events and transactions. . . . Robespierre and the Jacobin government, because they hated the very notion of a separation and division of powers, had to emasculate the societies as well as the sections of the Commune; under the condition of the centralization of power, the societies, each a small power structure of its own, and the self-government of the Communes were clearly a danger for the centralized state power.

What had happened? Speaking of Robespiere's transformation, Hannah Arendt says:

> What had perhaps been genuine passion turned into the boundlessness of an emotion that seemed to respond only too well to the boundless suffering of the multitude in their sheer overwhelming numbers. By the same token, he lost the capacity to hold fast to rapports with persons in their singularity. . . . It is in these matters, rather than in any particular fault of character, that we must look for the roots of Robespierre's surprising faithlessness that foreshadowed the greater perfidy which was to play such a monstrous role in the revolutionary tradition. Since the days of the French Revolution, it has been the boundlessness of their sentiments that made revolutionaries so curiously insensitive to reality in general and to the reality of persons in particular, whom they felt no compunction in sacrificing to their "principles," or to the course of history, or to the cause of revolution as such.

Now we begin to see the pattern according to which we and most of the modern world "think" about Revolution, bringing this comment from Hannah Arendt:

> It is odd indeed to see that twentieth-century American even more than European learned opinion is often inclined to interpret the American Revolution in the light of the French Revolution, or to criticize it because it so obviously did not conform to the lessons learned from the latter. The sad truth of the matter is that the French Revolution, which ended in disaster, has made world history, while the American Revolution, so triumphantly successful, has remained. an event of little more than local importance.

Two further comments are in order, one from a tough-minded modern thinker, Karl Popper, the other from Plato. "It must be one of the first principles of rational politics," Popper said some years ago, "that *we cannot make a heaven on earth."* When attempted, he added, it "has always led to the establishment of something like hell." Thousands of years before, Plato said that the emotion of myth should never be permitted to be a guide in politics, for myth, with its ambiguities, its provocation to vague imagining, becomes shifting sands for the legislator. As V. E. Walter has remarked, "Plato, one of the greatest mythmakers,

became the professed enemy of myth in the political realm."

It seems worth while to wonder why. Is it that the requirements of law-making are alien to the very spirit of the myth and transcendent tradition? That myths are indeed the tools of heaven-making, and on earth heaven-making must begin, and can perhaps be carried to fruition, only in individual human lives?

It is not difficult to recognize a conclusion something like this as the chief intended lesson of *Gulag Archipelago.* Unmediated myth, converted directly into politics, makes what Solzhenitsyn calls—

> Ideology—that is what gives evildoing its long-sought justification and gives the evildoer the necessary steadfastness and determination. That is the social theory which helps to make his acts seem good instead of bad in his own and others' eyes, so that he won't hear reproaches and curses but will receive praise and honors. That was how the agents of the Inquisition fortified their wills: by invoking Christianity; the conquerors of foreign lands, by extolling the grandeur of their Motherland; the colonizers, by civilization; the Nazis, by race; and the Jacobins (early and late), by equality, brotherhood, and the happiness of future generations.
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> Thanks to *ideology*, the twentieth century was fated to experience evildoing on a scale calculated in the millions.

The pervasive influence of ideological thinking infects the noblest of causes. Simone Weil, after visiting in 1938 the Loyalist front in the Spanish Civil War, wrote to George Bernanos, recalling—

> Men who seemed to be brave—there was one at least whose courage I personally witnessed—who would retail with cheery chuckles at convivial mealtimes how many priests they had murdered, or how many "fascists," the latter being a very elastic term. . . . As soon as men know they can kill without fear of punishment or blame, they kill. . . . I met peaceable Frenchmen, for whom I never before felt contempt and who would never have dreamed of doing any killing themselves, but who savoured that blood-polluted atmosphere with visible pleasure. . . .
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> The very purpose of the whole struggle is soon lost in an atmosphere of this sort. . . . One sets out as a volunteer, with the idea of sacrifice, and finds oneself in a war which resembles a war of mercenaries, only with much more cruelty and with less respect for the enemy.

This is how we have thought about Revolution. Surely the time has come to change.

REVIEW
IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING

IN the large, Psychology is the conscious and labeled part of the general quest for self-understanding which, more and more, is becoming the dominant theme of the age. As Carl Jung wrote in 1939: "The rapid and world-wide growth of a 'psychological' interest over the last two decades shows unmistakably that modern man has to some extent turned his attention from material things to his own subjective processes." What does this mean? It *could* mean that we are beginning to realize that it is more important to understand ourselves than to know the detailed workings of the external world. In time, this quest could bring a complete redefinition of human goals and a radical revision in the idea of "progress."

In thinking about such matters a central question is: What makes the human being? Is he a by-product of external forces and influences? Can man be adequately accounted for or "explained" by a judicious weighting of hereditary and environmental factors? Or is there also present in him a comparatively independent causal agent that needs to be defined in its own terms? Are humans at least partly self-moving units, as Plato maintained, and as Pico, laying the foundation of liberalism and humanism (in their original meaning), declared at the end of the fifteenth century?

Such questions are too nakedly metaphysical to be asked directly by most modern psychologists, yet their implications are nonetheless embedded in the forms of research that are proving fruitful, these days. Take for example *Six Russian Men: Lives in Turmoil* (Christopher paperback, 1976, $5.95) by Eugenia Hanfmann and Helen Beier. This book is the result of research undertaken twenty-five years ago. The six men interrogated, all but one born after 1917, were displaced persons who, finding themselves in Western Europe after World War II, "chose not to return" to the Soviet Union. They were selected as subjects for this study from a much larger group of displaced persons for the reason that they were "particularly informative, clear-cut, and colorful cases." In their preface the authors say:

> The subjects of our study have more in common than the same national culture. The *historical and social setting* of their lives has given a similar stamp to their fates. In the lives of our six subjects, *catastrophes* have loomed large; though only one had been in a labor camp, all have known extreme deprivation, disruption and threat. For most of them the blows began to fall early. . . . The [peasant] families of most of them were hard hit by the catastrophic events which went with the forced collectivization of agriculture. These events took place in the late twenties and early thirties when our five younger subjects were from five to fifteen years old. For most of them this early disruption was followed by a period of relative security during which these gifted and capable people worked out some adaptation to the new conditions of life. They did this by different means, but not one of them chose to adapt to the totalitarian state by serving the secret police. Our one older subject rose to high rank in the professional army; two were on the way to joining the Soviet elite, one of them was a convinced communist; two became skilled workers making better than an average living; only one remained trapped in abject poverty. But for all of them there was in store another series of catastrophes, which was unleashed by World War II and resulted in their uprooting and permanent displacement from their country. When we studied these men, their present was precarious and their future uncertain.

Why should the outlook and attitudes of these men be of particular interest? Twenty years ago, the authors point out, their account of life in Soviet Russia might satisfy a reader's curiosity, but today it is their "psychological life histories" against a background of disastrous change a series of catastrophes—that hold our attention. And the impressive thing, in practically all these cases, is the extraordinary resilience of human beings in the face of almost unending trouble. A reading of this book might provoke certain wonderings. For example:

How much of the best in human beings can survive and come through in what seems the worst of external circumstances?

How much of the worst in human beings sometimes becomes dominant in behavior, despite the best of circumstances?

Relativities would of course beset the replies to such inquiries, yet extremes of possibility have obvious importance in any study of the potentialities of human nature. While the subjects of this book were somewhat exceptional in character, they would not be classed as "heroes," but rather simply "good men." This, one could say, makes the report especially valuable as an account of some typical "good men" of peasant origin in Russia, where about 90 per cent of the population are of this class. Following is an appreciation of the work by a scholar at Brandeis:

> Here is no willful solipsism, no sense of alienation from others, only from bad ideas and a bad system. . . . The great Communist monolith could not destroy the individuality of these men whose gusto, curiosity, humor and sense of self is present throughout these pages. The ideological attack of Communism on family failed. One thing that Hanfmann and Beier effectively demonstrate: the human spirit, when cradled and encouraged by strong family, can prevail even over the most efficiently organized assault on family and individuality.

The authors found that on the whole the well-developed social perceptions of their subjects deprived them of "the personality prerequisites for becoming effective functionaries of a totalitarian state." This conclusion was in accord with other studies which discovered "sharp personality differences between the Soviet rulers and the ruled," and the authors note that "the regime-propagated image of the ideal Soviet man—with its emphasis on discipline and achievement and on sacrifice of interpersonal ties—is in many essential features the exact opposite of the values that emerge as central for the majority of these subjects."

These qualities are best conveyed by the portrait of one of the younger subjects, the communist Vladimir, who described to the interviewers "his views of the nature of human existence":

> According to V, the basic datum of human experience is the person in society (in the "collective"), and the person's basic problem, his life task, is to evolve ways to be fully one's individual self and yet fully a member of the community. The two parts of this task are equally important, neither must be sacrificed to the other, and only their harmonious synthesis makes the person whole and genuine. "A human being cannot be genuine if he lets his behavior be determined by the dictates of society; a person must act from within, as he truly is—not lead a double existence; and only that person is really good whose inner life naturally coincides with social ethics." It was V's professed belief that such harmony is possible, that in fact a person is most valuable for another and for the group if he has fully developed his unique individual assets and uses them to produce socially valuable results; each individual does have something unique, each one is valuable, and—contrary to the Marxist dogma—each one can, within limits, influence the course of major events if he has developed his willpower and personal strength. No individual can have absolute freedom; one person's freedom collides with that of another, and the conflict must be solved by mutual concessions often with unavoidable pain. Yet this necessity for self-limitation is amply compensated for by being valuable to others and valued by them; participation in a larger social whole, service to a cause, give meaning to a person's life. To isolate oneself from the whole, to betray it, is to destroy this meaning and to betray oneself. Self-isolation is the root of all evil, the cardinal sin.

Another subject, a man of about thirty-two who had been a skilled factory worker before the war, had remained in the West because he knew that in Russia, as a prisoner of war, he would probably be treated as a "traitor," as were so many who dared to return. His interviewer was particularly impressed by his command of feeling, "giving his narratives a vivid emotional coloring, but at no time, in no mood, did he pour out his feelings, and he was never carried away by his story or his arguments."

> He told only in passing that at home they ate grass during the famine and were all swollen up; that

> as a prisoner he was severely beaten by the Germans. . . . at times quite eloquent, . . . he never sounded boastful or exuberant. . . . Whether the topic demanded a narration of past events, an expression of belief or opinions, or a free play of fantasy, he tackled it without hesitation in a matter-of-fact way and did a good job of each task. He expressed his sentiments with conviction, pleasantly gave free rein to fantasy in projective techniques, and was sound and moderate in his observations and judgments. Particularly impressive in a person who had finished only seven grades of school was the unpretentious but serious effort he made, in response to questions on ideology, to develop a full and coherent philosophy of human life in society.

We have in these subjects a clear instance of the endlessly repeated puzzle—moral man in immoral society. We have decent and striving human beings against a background of catastrophe, man-made disaster, and injustice. Conceivably, if we were to think more seriously in terms of such human possibilities, instead of formulating economic goals and political forms, we would in the end have far greater success with our social constructions.

COMMENTARY
LEARNING FROM HISTORY

WHILE the American Revolution was in some ways a great success (see page 7), one omission from its accomplishments has filled the present with disaster. Although the Revolution brought political freedom, there was little understanding of the need to cherish and strengthen the *schools* of self-government which had served the colonies so well.

What were they? They were the townships, evolved over a century or so, providing, as Lewis Mumford remarks, "a princely spaciousness for democratic purposes." In *The City in History* Mumford says:

> . . . the New England town deliberately refused to grow beyond the possibility of socializing and assimilating its members: it thus brought into existence, and in many places kept going for two centuries, a balance between rural and urban occupations, as well as an internal balance of population and usable land.

Mumford speaks of the township as an evolution of community responsibility, quoting Emerson, who understood well what was being lost by the transfer of governing functions from towns and townships to larger units ruled from distant centers. Emerson wrote in his *Journal* (1853): "In the Western States and in New York and Pennsylvania, the town system is not the base, and therefore the expenditure of the legislature is not economic but prodigal." Since state and federal governments, as Hannah Arendt notes, were "the proudest results of revolution," their activities hid the importance of the townships and their meeting halls. What Emerson termed "the unit of the Republic" and "the school of the people"—the town—was withered by the preoccupation with national affairs. The people, as a result, lost not only power but also responsibility and *interest.* One or two of the Founding Fathers saw this happening, but only vaguely. Benjamin Rush remarked that while "all power is derived from the people, they possess it only on the days of their elections." At all other times, he said, the power "is the property of their rulers."

How did the people lose their power? Basically, by the loss of circumstances requiring responsibility. Getting it back mechanically, whether by ballot or more direct means, would accomplish little, since power is destructive without corresponding responsibility in its use. There is but one way to intelligent use of power: by growing it as a by-product of increasing community responsibility—the way it grew before.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
COUGARS AND AUTODIDACTS

BOOKS having a care for human qualities which are becoming quite rare, although still persistent against odds, are always valuable to those who teach. Too often, a purely *social* interest or concern submits to being shaped by statistical averages, eventually embracing the norms of mediocrity as serving the greatest good of the greatest number. Leaving people (including children) free to *become,* rather than making it comfortable for them to stay the way they are, is another way of putting the same idea. *The Human Cougar* (Prometheus Books, 1976, $8.95), by Lloyd Morain, singles out a number of a hardy breed of American Westerners for particular notice and appreciation, showing, along the way, that the tendencies of social organization in America are making it very difficult for these people to survive.

Actually, such books are a devastating commentary on typical American goals and habits of mind. If we measured humans according to their independent excellences instead of by their possessions or power, these "cougar" types, as Lloyd Morain calls them, would need no advocate, since they would be spontaneously valued as exemplars instead of neglected as mavericks and outsiders.

Consider the unlikelihood or improbability of a boyhood, today, such as Lloyd Morain describes:

> In my boyhood we used to go down to the San Jacinto River after it rained to catch rattlesnakes as they crawled out from the rocks along the riverbed in search of higher ground. Our teacher sold the venom, and the money was used to buy glass beakers and test tubes for the high school chemistry class. In this semi-arid region, I remember how we planted barley, which never quite made threshing worthwhile, and milked the scrawny but dependable family goats; and I remember the apricot-drying shed, where you could meet people who were from other places, even Mexico.
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> High school was all right, but it was more exciting down along the tracks, for I never knew for sure who might be there: someone with a different story, with a different way of looking at the world, and often a need I could fill in return. There was the little bakery that let me have a loaf of "day-old" bread for a nickel. Putting the loaf into the basket hooked on the handle bars, I'd bicycle down the dirt road along the tracks to the edges of town where I would almost always find one or more tramps, road kids, or drifters camped out in the weed patches and tamarisk trees that were commonly called "jungles."
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> To this day I remember asking a fellow there who was about my age, fifteen: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I can still see his perplexed expression and recall his hesitation from not having really thought about the problem in serious terms. He finally replied: "So today I eat, tomorrow I'll go out looking. I'm real handy. I think I can do a bit of anything."

Young people seldom confide in their parents about such experiences and attractions. It makes them nervous. They don't want their children to risk the wandering life of a jack-of-all-trades, or someone who chooses "the road" in preference to urban or suburban security. The point, of course, is not that being some kind of hobo is better than town life, but that submission to conventions which shut out natural diversity and challenge eventually produces a life that's hardly worth living, filling the schools with so much monotony that they're not worth going through. This explains why the people Lloyd Morain writes about, whatever their limitations, help us to see the vital truth in Thoreau's dictum—"In wildness is the preservation of the world." It is somewhat depressing to realize that we live in a society which obliges us to look under rocks to find a few examples of some of the qualities of a really good life.

For a random illustration of the difference between that time (Lloyd Morain's boyhood) and now, there is the fact that late last year the Los Angeles School Board voted not to ban the sale of junk food in the public schools. Why? It wasn't because the board members think that junk food is good for children, but because the income it produces is enough to pay for certain important school programs and equipment. Fifty years ago the kids (in this area) went out in the canyon and caught rattlesnakes to pay for the beakers they needed in chemistry class. It may have been hard on the rattlers, but this is *not* an endangered species, while

really healthy children, to hear some nutritionists on the subject, are becoming hard to find because of what the young eat, these days.

Lloyd Morain's book is about people he has known who embody the "classic American virtues of resourcefulness, self-reliance, anti-institutionalism, and uncomplaining courage, mixed at times with an astonishing sensitivity and tenderness toward their fellow men and nature." He asks, in effect, what sort of adults will our children become if they never have contact with people like that? What will be dropped out of their lives? Do we really expect each generation of the young to *reinvent* these qualities, despite the systematic discouragement of the older people in charge?

The virtues, after all, can't be taught. No one knows how to teach them—not even Plato and Socrates knew how to do it. People pick up these moral excellences from others in imperceptible ways—from feeling their value—the way, happily, Lloyd Morain picked them up, and then told about them in a book.

It is of some interest that the people who devote lifelong serious attention to education are usually the ones who see the importance of this kind of learning. Arthur Morgan once pointed out that a small boy absorbs far more by hanging around the local blacksmith shop—in his day there *were* blacksmith shops—than he does at school. In a brief history of education (in an unpublished book) Morgan noted that in the days before formal schooling was established the young learned practically everything they needed to know from experiences around the home. This was possible because the home was where nearly everybody—all the adults—did their work, and the skills of the household and mechanical or even professional arts were transmitted from generation to generation by this means. It was the need of schools to teach special knowledge—"advanced" subjects—which developed when learning became abstract—that eventually spoiled the home and community environment as the natural setting for education.

So it was our big step of "progress" in learning—requiring professors with degrees to instruct in academic subjects—that weakened and finally eliminated the really normal way of growing up. Only now are we beginning to realize the extent of the loss, by seeing the devastating effect on children of going to school.

It seems likely that in any society where professional teachers are regarded as indispensable and far more competent than the parents to bring up children—that is, to teach them what they need to know in order to live useful, constructive lives—serious distortions and artificialities will result. Parents sometimes do what they can to correct for the inadequacy of schools, but parents are usually quite busy making money, or trying not to go broke, so there is hardly enough time left for creating a natural environment for learning around the home. It is indeed a common problem, with guilt and blame evenly distributed among us all.

Another slant on learning is provided by Ortega in *Some Lessons on Metaphysics* (Norton, 1969). In the first chapter Ortega points out that in every class of students the only ones who learn anything important are the natural skeptics who distrust their textbooks, and who are tough enough to insist on questioning whatever they are taught. What they learn, in short, is what they prove to their own satisfaction. This, Ortega maintains, is the only way real knowledge is acquired.

It is not, then, the job of educators to "teach," but rather to generate in their students, by whatever means, the hunger to know for themselves. "Transmitting the cultural heritage"—as though teachers could actually know what is right and true—as though our "cultural heritage" were *good* enough to be passed on unquestioned—is a fraud in the name of education.

What sort of people do we want and need for the future? The answer is obvious: Self-reliant mavericks and autodidacts—people, to coin a phrase, who "think for themselves."

FRONTIERS

Decentralist Ways and Means

SOLAR ENERGY: ONE WAY TO CITIZEN CONTROL is a useful and pertinent publication of the Center for Science in the Public Interest (1757 S Street, Northwest, Washington, D.C. 20009), edited by Albert Fritsch, with several contributors. This really informing and responsibly compiled book (124 pages) illustrates an effective combination of scientific background with socially educational purpose. Every reader who is endeavoring to think (and in some degree act) his way through to decentralist goals will find it valuable.

The importance of such material becomes evident from a story in the (Dec. 1) *C. S. Monitor* reporting that "Texas is emerging as a key state in the research and development of solar energy." Developments described are mostly ERDA-funded projects that will cost millions. Revealing paragraphs:

> Texas already ranks as No. 1 producer of oil and natural gas in the United States. But the state's gas and oil supply, along with the rest of the nation, is declining. . . .
>
> Across the state, San Antonio is one of three finalists in competition for a $100 million experimental solar electric plant. The city also has applied to become the site of a permanent Solar Energy Research Institute.

Should we say that all this sounds promising indeed? Well, yes and no. The Science in the Public Interest book points out:

> The programs devised by the federal government to accelerate solar energy development miss the most important barriers which impede the progress of solar energy.
>
> The federal government has shown particular unwillingness to focus on decentralized applications of solar energy. ERDA gives solar electric applications much higher priority than solar heating and cooling. The large power towers receive the largest share of funding for photothermal generation. Programs for dispersed photothermal systems and total energy systems are getting much less money. ERDA seems to have an aversion to small-scale and simple technologies. In all fairness, however, ERDA does have an office for decentralized use of solar energy. It is staffed by one person.
>
> Although the federal government is interested in solar energy, it wants to fit solar energy into the basic centralized scheme that exists today. Thus, the federal government provides funding for the electric and gas utility leasing programs and gives photovoltaic researcb grants to the major oil companies. These are the institutions which the federal government is most experienced in dealing with.
>
> Although the federal government is helping the cause of solar energy, its actions have hindered energy decentralization and community development of local energy resources. As long as the major responsibility for energy planning rests with the federal government, the trend towards centralization, with all its attendant problems, will continue. Control of the energy supply will be taken further and further away from citizens, energy use will continue to be inefficient and wasteful, and environmental damage caused by improper resource development will proliferate.
>
> The alternative is to shift primary responsibility for energy planning to the municipal level. All areas of the United States are endowed with energy resources which can be developed in an ecologically sound way. The first step in resolving the national energy problem is for communities to develop their own resources.

Solar Energy provides basic geophysical education for the general reader as well as sound information on the social economics of power from the sun. The price of the book is $8.00, but public interest groups can have it for $4.00, and even that price is negotiable for "needy individuals." (Although it may be a bit confusing, this way of doing business will become normal and natural under decentralized conditions!)

Another crucial factor in any program of decentralization turns on independent local food supply. According to a story in *Co-Evolution Quarterly* for last fall, community gardening programs have been growing rapidly for the past two years. A number of cities are actively

engaged in encouraging such programs, but of course people started doing it first, giving municipalities the idea. Fortunately, there are people working in government who take hold of such ideas and try to make their application spread. For example, one of the areas of emphasis of the California Office of Appropriate Technology, headed by Sim Van der Ryn, is small-scale food supply, including community gardens, cooperative ventures in production and marketing food products, organic-ecosystem farming, and alternative methods of land tenure. How does it happen that such activities may be supported by state government? Probably because what Sim Van der Ryn accomplished as founder of the Farallones Institute made such a stir that Governor Brown decided the state should help.

What can be done at the city level is well illustrated in a book recently published by the Community Environmental Council of Santa Barbara—*Agriculture in the City*, prepared by some two dozen participants in the El Mirasol "educational farm" this urban group conducted for several years. The chapter headings give an idea of the contents: Garden Design and the First Year—Raised-Bed Gardening Technique—Composting—Transplanting—Crop Rotation and Fertilization—Pest Control—Chickens at El Mirasol—Urban Beekeeping—Methane Experiments—Solar Energy Experiments—El Mirasol Stimulates New Urban Planning Concepts.

The value of this book lies in its showing of what these pioneers were able to accomplish in stimulating more gardening in their community, and teaching people how to do it—in plain sight—almost as though they were giving lessons in a department store window right in the middle o£ town. The way their programs took hold is exciting. And while the farm has had to move, the new land is better for future development, permitting a much more extensive educational program. For copies of *Agriculture in the City* write to the Community Environmental Council, 109 E. De La Guerra Street, Santa Barbara, Calif. 93101—price $2.75 (including postage) .