

IDEAS AND BELIEFS

PERIODICALLY, the pride men take in their intellectual triumphs is made to suffer a distinct and humbling fall. At present, the entire cycle of "rationalist" progress is being called into question, although in a mood quite different from the Freudian claims of fifty years ago, when the deceptive devices of repressed emotion began to have general attention. The modern world seems to be preparing itself for another great swing of the pendulum of popular belief, comparable in dimensions to the transformation in ought begun by Copernicus and Galileo more than three hundred years ago, with the focus now on the inner world of feelings and longings instead of the external realities regarded as the domain of science.

What part does the intellect play in such great changes? Very little, it seems. While logic may endorse, it does not initiate. It is one of the delights of relativist historians to show that major alterations in opinion are mainly the result of complex "conditioning" which wears away at the foundations of common belief. We see this whenever the past becomes remote enough to be examined objectively. Yet there is also a compelling drive to think as clearly as we can and to make decisions deliberately. In a time of disillusionment with intellectuality, we nonetheless rely on the intellect to reduce self-deception and to guide the beginnings of new enterprises.

It is simply unacceptable to our intelligence to think that human beings are wholly shaped by outside forces. While superficially clever individuals may declare this during cultural fits of depression, using externalizing systems of rationalist analysis in which the mind turns against itself, the healthier, general current of thought moves on the assumption that progress is possible, that positive effort and search are natural, and that

recognition of meaning is the peculiarly human mode of growth and realization.

Yet systems of belief do change. Yesterday's convictions dissolve into ardors which are in some ways their polar opposites. It is a salutary experience to read in Lecky's *History of European Morals* about the early generations of Christians who believed that the more painful their lives became, the closer they were to heavenly rewards. The contrast with previous "pagan" feelings and attitudes seems virtually incredible. No wonder, we say to ourselves, the Dark Ages followed from this prologue of religious fanaticism. Lecky says:

There is, perhaps, no phase in the history of mankind of a deeper or more painful interest than this ascetic epidemic. A hideous, sordid, and emaciated maniac, without knowledge, without patriotism, without natural affection, passing his life in a long routine of useless and atrocious self-torture, and quailing before the ghastly phantasms of his delirious brain, had become the ideal of the nations which had known the writings of Plato and Cicero and the lives of Socrates and Cato. For about two centuries, the hideous maceration of the body was regarded as the highest proof of excellence. . . .

With such men, living such a life, visions and miracles were necessarily habitual. All the elements of hallucination were there. Ignorant and superstitious, believing as a matter of religious conviction that countless dæmons filled the air, attributing every fluctuation of his temperament, and every exceptional phenomenon in surrounding nature, to spiritual agency; delirious, too, from solitude and long-continued austerities, the hermit soon mistook for palpable realities the phantoms of his brain. . . . An imagination strained to the utmost limit, acting upon a frame attenuated and diseased by macerations, produced bewildering psychological phenomena, paroxysms of conflicting passions, sudden alternations of joy and anguish, which he regarded as manifestly supernatural.

Such beliefs continued, although with lessening intensity, until, as Lecky says, education

passed from the monasteries to the universities, until Islamic science, reviving freethought, and the rise of industrialism "broke the sceptre of the Church," allowing the intellectual awakening of Europe to begin. By the twentieth century, the reaction was complete, with excesses of belief plainly in the opposite direction. In a book published in the 1930's, *The Fields and Methods of Sociology*, L. L. Bernard confidently declared:

The old theological assumption of personal control through spirit direction, which later developed into a theory of spirit possession, and thence into a theory of an individual or personal soul (a permanent indwelling directive spirit), has given away, under the analysis of neurons, cortexes, and endocrines, to the behavioristic theory of the conditioned response and stimulus-response or behavior patterns. The spiritualists and theologians and the metaphysicians have not welcomed this science of personality and they have not hesitated to reveal their intellectual character by their strenuous efforts to sweep back the oncoming tide of behavioristic science with their witchbrooms on which they have been accustomed to ride in the clouds of spiritistic phantasy. But in spite of this bit of diverting hobby-horse play a science of personality based on a measurable mechanics of behavior is bound to replace the old magical and mystical spiritism which still survives in the thousand and one cults that delight in calling themselves psychological.

Books like this one are now seldom encountered, and if current publications and even the courses offered in modern universities are any indication, there is now increasing hospitality to conceptions of human nature and possibility which would have been wholly outlawed by the self-assured mechanists of a generation ago. What, we may wonder, lies behind such comparatively sudden changes of opinion and conviction? Has there been a noticeable increase in the persuasiveness of the arguments of thinkers with an idealistic turn of mind? Has the evidence for super-physical or supernormal reality offered by the parapsychologists become overwhelmingly convincing, causing modern skepticism to capitulate and withdraw? Such decisive changes, Lecky became convinced, do not take place as logical steps of rational progress. From his

exhaustive studies of European history, he concluded that "the success of any opinion depended much less upon the force of its arguments, or upon the ability of its advocates, than upon the predisposition of society to receive it." Continuing, he wrote:

A change of speculative opinions does not imply an increase of the data upon which those opinions rest, but a change of the habits of thought and mind which they reflect. Definite arguments are the symptoms and pretexts, but seldom the causes of the change. Their chief merit is to accelerate the inevitable crisis. They derive their force from their conformity with the mental habits of those to whom they are addressed. Reasoning which in one age would make no impression whatever, in the next age is received with enthusiastic applause.

Of chief interest, here, is Lecky's use of reason to recognize and to understand its own inadequacies. The attitudes on which people act are not what we regard as rational, or fully rational. Rather they are formed by deep beliefs which are seldom carefully examined, although, after being admitted, such convictions may gain elaborate intellectual justification. The exploration of these beliefs, apart from their justification, should be much more valuable to us than a critique of the rationalizations. It was to these inward attitudes that Plato addressed himself, although at a highly conscious level, and to which Shakespeare appealed more popularly. One might conclude that such thinkers are actually the only real educators. The enterprise of Socrates was to reach into and inspect the foundations of behavior of his fellow Athenians, hoping thereby to encourage a more deliberately intelligent way of life. Lecky, too, seemed to be trying to get at this basis of action in remarking that study of the lives of men of past ages is much more informing than the official documents of history. Speaking of these biographies, he said:

They may not tell us with accuracy what men did at particular epochs; but they display with the utmost vividness what they thought and felt, their measure of probability, and their ideal of excellence. Decrees of councils, elaborate treatises of theologians, creeds, liturgies, and canons, are all but the husks of

religious history. They reveal what was professed and argued before the world, but not that which was realized in the imagination or enshrined in the heart.

This sort of awareness—which amounts to distinguishing between thinking about objects or goals and methods of accomplishment, and thinking about *thinking*—may be the peculiar achievement of the present age. While Lecky and Buckle were both aware of the puzzling character of great changes in opinion, only today has this problem been subjected to persistent examination. An excellent example of the current mood of inquiry is provided by Jacob Needleman in *A Sense of the Cosmos*. This philosophical psychologist writes of the diminishing strength of movements which in their publicized beginnings were regarded as "new dispensations" expected to transform all human life:

. . . although psychiatry in its many forms utterly pervades our present culture, the hope it once contained has slowly ebbed away. The once charismatic psychiatrist has become encapsulated within the workaday medical establishment, itself the object of growing public cynicism. The behaviorist who once stunned the world by defining man as a bundle of manageable reactions finds himself reduced to mere philosophizing and to the practice of piecemeal psychological cosmetics. In the burgeoning field of psychophysiology the cries of "breakthrough" echo without real conviction before the awesome and mysterious structure of the human brain. And as for experimental psychology, it has become mute; masses of data accumulated over decades of research with animals remains unrelated and seemingly unrelatable to the suffering, fear and frustration of everyday human life.

The growing feeling of helplessness among psychiatrists and the cries for help from the masses of modern people operate in perverse contrast to the constant psychologizing of the media. Amid the "answers" provided by a *Psychology Today* or *Reader's Digest*, millions seem quite simply to have accepted that their lives have no great direction and ask only for help to get them through the night. . . .

No one suffers from this lack more than the psychiatrists themselves, more and more of whom despair over their inability to help another human being in the fundamental way they once dreamed possible. Faced with the accelerating pressure of

technology upon the normal patterns of human life faced with the widespread effects of modern man's twisted relationship with nature, and themselves yearning for a coherent purpose in living, they have come to see themselves as being in the same situation as their patients and the rest of us.

Such, in quick strokes, is the background of a new question that is now arising concerning the hidden structure and distortions of man's inner life. A large and growing number of psychiatrists are now convinced that the Eastern religions offer an understanding of the mind far more complete than anything yet envisaged by Western science. At the same time, the leaders of the new religions themselves—the numerous gurus and spiritual teachers now in the West—are reformulating and adapting the traditional systems according to the language and atmosphere of modern psychology.

Mr. Needleman's chief concern is with the possibility that the modern West may seize the sometimes potent ideas of ancient religion as though they afforded another intellectual formula for defining the universe and providing the means to rapid personal development. What, he asks in effect, is the importance and true role of "ideas" in human life? He wonders if "the present turning toward the teachings of the East, which on the surface seems to be a movement against or beyond science, may actually also be a part of the same process by which science itself arose and eventually bred elements that now threaten the life of man on earth."

Ortega seemed to be wrestling with almost the same question when he made clear distinction between the deep-lying beliefs on which we act and the opinions or ideas that we hold:

. . . The characteristic thing about "beliefs" when contrasted with "ideas" or opinions—including in these the most strictly scientific doctrines—is that reality, complete and genuine reality, is for us simply what we believe and never what we think. It is the same thing in reverse to say that our "beliefs" never appear to us as opinions, personal or collective or universal, but as "reality" itself. . . . From this it follows that *we never believe in an idea*, and as theory—science, philosophy, and so on—is nothing but "ideas," it makes no sense to pretend that man believes in theory.

If this analysis is approximately correct, we might say that an "idea" loses its superficial status only after we have taken it so much to heart that we no longer need to think about "applying" it because it has become a part of ourselves.

Mr. Needleman summarizes the issue of his book briefly in a letter to the *Spring American Scholar*:

As I see it and as I tried to explain . . . the problem can actually be faced by first recognizing that something has gone wrong in modern man's general relationship to ideas. Since the Age of Enlightenment, we have tended to assume that grasping an idea intellectually is sufficient basis for an effort to apply the idea and even to promote it. Such an assumption, however, only accentuates the disharmony that exists between the intellectual, emotional, and instinctual aspects of human nature and, when carried to the extremes that characterize the modern era, masks the contradictions between these aspects that result in our inability to live according to what we "know" to be true and good. The ancient teachings seem always to have recognized that certain ideas about man and universe must be transmitted in ways that touch all aspects of human nature, for in each of these aspects there is a quality of mind that needs to be "informed" of the truth in a manner that corresponds to its nature.

This seems a way of saying that our intellectuality is something like the drawing-board of an engineer. Before he can build, he must make a drawing; but a good engineer will usually insist that he function as field superintendent also, going out on the job, adjusting his plans to fit the "realities" of the construction as it emerges in three dimensions. The engineer, however, has certain advantages that we lack in applying ideas in our own lives. He acquaints himself with the conditions that must be met by a careful inspection of the site. He will anticipate the limits of the contractor's competence, and also the limits of his client's pocketbook. In short, he knows his business as both planner and builder.

Quite evidently, as a culture and civilization in search of human progress, we have very little of this essential prior knowledge. The symmetry of great ideas, the inspiration of religious verities, the

insight of Eastern psychology—such elements have a natural attraction, but the question is: how are they appropriately put to work? We are both site and building, and we know hardly anything about ourselves. It is quite easy to be intoxicated by the magic of words, or charmed and persuaded by the elegance of ad hoc metaphysical constructions. It seems likely that virtually every superstition in the world was once a sacred formula—or something better, turning into a formula only when put into familiar words—whose meaning has been lost through mechanical application.

It is as though the core of human beings has remained a mystery throughout the period of our accelerated intellectual development, and that our extreme preoccupation with the application of fairly simple ideas to the manipulation of the elements and energies of the physical world has prevented any thoughtful attention to the fact of this mystery.

What can we say with any certainty about the core reality of man? Very little. At the same time, a great deal. There are qualities of excellence in human relations which we admire, no matter what the "ideas" held in connection with them. This, in fact, is a source of puzzlement to us, since it is simply impossible by either analysis or speculative synthesis to put together a sequence of ideas that will make clear the origin, character, and development of human excellence. When this is attempted, some sort of "ideology" results, which is not at all what we're after.

There are indeed schools which have attempted to outwit the intellect by using riddles, paradoxes, and shock techniques, but the result of these methods is no more predictable than the response of a miscellaneous gathering of people to a lecture obscurely salted with wisdom. The people themselves determine in great variety what is made, if anything, out of what they hear.

The intellect seems to be some kind of mirror in which all the multifarious processes of nature and life can be reflected. We see the wonder of

some reflection, in all its two-dimensional splendor, and suppose that we have come upon knowledge or "truth." And so we have, in a manner of speaking. But to see that particular reflection—the one which now engages our attention—in all its complex relations with every other possible reflection: this is something that the intellect cannot do. It is as Buckminster Fuller says: You can never see the other side of the orange—or planet or sun—while looking at the one before you. To see or know something in the round, you have to *be* it, not just abstract snapshots of its reflections. Meanwhile, it seems beyond the capacity of the intellect to restrain itself from assuming that the part is equal to the whole. So we are continually discovering the need to make corrections for what we have missed. The best the intellect can do might be aptly described as the archetype of the "technological fix."

The intellect is a tool, not the self. It may feel like a self; and it tries to masquerade as a self; but as Ortega said, "*we are* never our ideas, we never confuse them with ourselves, but we merely think of them, and all thinking, to put it in concrete terms, is only fantasy."

Yet ideas are the only means we have of conscious dialogue with ourselves and with one another. And ideas sometimes burst into flame, having been ignited by some spark of feeling emitted by the mysterious core of our being. It is as though we carry around with us great bags or collections of notions—clots and clutches of ideas that we have found useful in one way or another. The question is: Will any of these impedimenta bring an increase in our sense of beinghood or our competence in living a life?

The cultural history of the past that we find in Lecky, in books by Carl Becker, in E. A. Burtt, illustrates over and over again the transitions from one set of ideas to another, but it is exceedingly difficult to determine when something significant is happening beneath the surface—affecting the *core* of all these people. Is anything happening,

today, in the core of ourselves? To ask this question, in deep seriousness, may be the first step toward learning how to use the mind in ways that, in the past, have been known only to the few.

REVIEW

GEORGE RUSSELL—"AE"

THERE may be particular value in the present publication of a full-length biography of George W. Russell—better known to many as "AE." The Irish poet was successful in combining harmoniously purposes often thought to be opposed. Russell was born in 1867 in Dublin of Protestant parents. During his early years, from inward inspiration as well as by philosophic study, he reached the conclusion that a human being's life can be—and is—what he determines it to be. He pursued an enormously fruitful and useful career, shaping it deliberately according to his best judgment. His accomplishments show how a man of some natural talent, but not a genius, is able to put his abilities to work in areas naturally available to him, and to live a wholly admirable life despite very great obstacles. Russell saw in the struggles of the Irish for economic survival and independence an aspect of the struggles of all mankind. In this account of his work and his day-to-day decisions the reader has opportunity to recognize deliberate if unostentatious application of timeless philosophy to what seem almost insoluble problems. *That Myriad-Minded Man* is the title of Henry Summerfield's full-length biography of George Russell, published by Rowman and Littlefield (Totowa, N.J., 1975, \$18.50).

Judging from Mr. Summerfield's work, Russell never stopped growing or developing in one way or another, until his death in 1935. His stature does not become clear simply from reading his books and poetry or looking at reproductions of his paintings. What he stands for becomes plain enough from his books and essays, but to obtain a true sense of what he did with his life the effect he had on others, on his countrymen, over what is now almost a century of history—a book like this one is required. Something of the quality of his influence is conveyed by the report of a talk he gave in Savannah, Georgia, in the fall of 1930. He had been brought to the United States for a

lecture tour, to speak during that year of extreme economic depression of the work he had done in Ireland to help the farmers raise themselves to a more self-reliant life. What he said in Savannah, according to a newspaper report, expressed the philosophy he had developed over twenty years. He used the inspiring figure of a lowly Irish peasant who transformed himself into a helper and teacher of his countrymen, while also bringing in such great artists as Phidias and Michelangelo as part of his vision of "a rural civilization which could redeem human life and human nature." The effect on the audience is described by the writer for the *Savannah News*:

Those who responded most deeply to the mystical quality running through his speech felt almost as if he were surrounded by an invisible emanation which changed him before their eyes. For the time, they lived in another world, a serene world of beauty and high desires, into which he lifted them on his wings. When he described the land, like Plato's "many-coloured land," that he had created in imagination for himself as a youth, desiring to escape from the world of business into which he was forced, they saw with him this beautiful world, "self-shining, shining from within by its own light," with its birds in blazing colours, among the blazing leaves of the trees. This was poetry of the purest most glorious sort, uttered in memorable prose. He fed his audience almost into the poet's vision of the *rosa mystica*.

He told of the pity and sorrow with which he had walked in the dark hours of the night through the lowest street of Dublin, seeing poverty, brawling, drunkenness and bestiality, and of how there had suddenly come to him consciousness of the immortality which lifts man out of such depths into the godlike, and the audience shared his compassion and his exaltation, feeling in both something divine.

A sort of glory hung about him when he talked. He was poet and prophet. When he stopped the mantle dropped from him for a moment. He stood hesitant, a simple, kindly gentle man, a little bewildered by the applause, and the audience woke too from the dream.

How had this poet and painter, mystic and dreamer, become so closely associated with agricultural methods and reform that he was invited to lecture on these subjects before

American audiences? In 1897, more or less at the suggestion of his intimate friend, W. B. Yeats, Russell had gone to work for Horace Plunkett's Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, begun in 1894 as a program of land reform and to train the peasants in better farming practice and economic management. Plunkett hoped to establish cooperative groups among the farmers and to teach them, through credit unions, how to free themselves from bondage to the moneylenders—the gombeens, who were usually shopkeepers.

At the close of the last century the common people of Ireland were extreme sufferers from both poverty and divisive faction. The Great Famine of the 1840s—which took the lives of millions—was still remembered by many, and because of deaths and immigration the population was only eight million, half the pre-famine level.

The bulk of the people worked on the land and tried to make a meagre living by farming inefficiently in tiny uneconomic holdings. Many of them lived in small cottages and some in one-room mud cabins with a single window. A journey to the nearest town did little to brighten the peasant's life. Devoid of culture, it had nothing to offer but drab, dirty streets, shops meagrely stocked with a jumble of overpriced shoddy goods, and the solace of a cheerless public house. In such an environment it is not surprising that so many Irishmen turned to drink. . . . Irish poverty was greatly aggravated by the fierce antagonisms between different sections of the people. While the bulk of the land was owned by a Protestant aristocracy, the descendants of British settlers, most of the tenants, except in Ulster, belonged to the Catholic and Celtic majority that had been Gaelic-speaking as recently as the beginning of the nineteenth century. Many landlords contributed to the impoverishment of the country, as had their families for generations, by spending a large part of their incomes abroad or on imported goods. Often the farmer deliberately avoided making the most of his holding, lest his rent be raised.

Plunkett noticed that the farmers who took part in the cooperative movements sponsored by the I.A.O.S. became more self-reliant and confident, and also got along well with each other, whether Catholic or Protestant, whether believing in union with Britain or in home rule. Russell

joined with Plunkett because he saw in this kind of organization and program a means to both practical betterment and the human brotherhood in which he deeply believed. He spent many years of his life working for the Agricultural Society, first as a "missionary" out in the field, talking to the peasants, holding meetings, helping them to organize credit societies and showing them how to manage funds with the sound business practice he had learned during the years he worked for a large drapery store in Dublin. He later became editor of the weekly *Irish Homestead* which Plunkett had started to help spread the ideas of the I.A.O.S. Russell learned to write and speak directly to the peasants, and was widely successful in getting them to organize for their own good.

When he had persuaded a group of farmers to start a bank, he would return a day or two later to advise the committee. He continuously pointed to the fields which could be drained, the stones which could be removed, and the livestock which could be bought if a little money were available, and he hammered away relentlessly at the evil of private moneylending. . . . Occasionally he encountered a comic incident: a man asked for a loan from a credit bank to buy a suit and when the committee pointed out that this was not productive, he explained that it would result in his marrying a girl who owned two acres, a pig, and twenty-five pounds. . . .

AE often referred to his personal knowledge of every county in Ireland. Until 1905, he made frequent journeys by bicycle and jaunting-car to address meetings of farmers, and his travels continued to involve considerable hardship. . . . At the end of 1908, to Yeats's amazement, AE was already drawing up a plan of his own for congested districts, which roused the enthusiasm of Gerald Balfour, the Chief Secretary for Ireland. A year later he delivered a long lecture on the subject in which he advocated the introduction of cooperative organizations to enable the farmers to borrow cheaply, to buy their raw materials at wholesale prices, to sell their products profitably, and to rent or purchase grazing land jointly. . . . AE's greatest strength as an organizer lay in his power to make the poor and uneducated share his dream of a community where each man working by himself would work for all.

Where did Russell get his inspiration? First of all, he got it from himself. While still in his teens he lay awake one night, thinking of the form of man emerging from the universal or divine mind, and he seemed to hear the word *Aön* whispered to him. Later he read in the Gnostic teachings of a glorious being or spirit—the Æon or Logos—who revolted against the eternal passivity and determined to create a world. Then, as Mr. Summerfield puts it: "Recognizing both the human psyche and external nature as manifestations of the one Divine Spirit, he felt that when man was able partly to rise above the personal self of the waking consciousness he could perceive elements of his kinship with the created world and affinities imperceptible to the unaided reason."

Brought into contact with Theosophy by the scholar, Charles Johnston, Russell found confirmation of his conception of a transcendent self in the writings of H. P. Blavatsky, and Theosophy became the shaping influence of his life, especially its ideal of service to others. Those who neglect their duty to their fellow men, he said, are "spiritual blacklegs" who are "passionately in love with themselves." There is much in this book about Russell's study and exposition of Theosophy and its influence, through him, on the Irish Renaissance. The various branches of the Theosophical Society, he felt, went off the track, but throughout his life he maintained an independent study group in Dublin, using *The Secret Doctrine* by Madame Blavatsky as a text.

Mr. Summerfield regards Russell's decision to join Plunkett's movement as a deliberate fulfillment of the altruistic duty to which he felt drawn:

He knew that the greatness of a nation depends on the character of its individual citizens, and seeing his fellow-countrymen cowed and stunted by the misery of extreme poverty, he remembered that man was "a god in exile." Though he yearned to travel on the lonely path back to the Spirit and to guide kindred souls on that path, he was constantly mindful of the

example of the Buddha's renunciation and he longed to serve all mankind. In November, 1897, he found himself confronted with two alternatives: to expound the teaching of Theosophy to fellow disciples, or to show the ignorant and oppressed how to seek prosperity, dignity, and even beauty. He entered Plunkett's movement and though he was often to wonder that he, a poet and mystic, should be instructing farmers, he knew that he had not made the less noble choice.

This life of AE gives full attention to the part played by Theosophical ideas in his life, and also in his poetry and paintings. It shows how Russell used his transcendental inspiration to enrich and support the simple, practical tasks of agricultural reform in behalf of his countrymen. *That Myriad-Minded Man* makes a fine introduction to Russell's books.

COMMENTARY

THE IMPOSSIBLE TAKES FOREVER

IN *Science* for April 8, Dr. George L. Engel, who teaches medicine and psychiatry at the University of Rochester School of Medicine, calls for a broader and more inclusive "Medical Model" to replace what he calls the "Biomedical Model" of the medical schools. The assumptions of the biomedical outlook, he says, are exclusionist and reductionist: "Biomedical dogma requires that all disease, including 'mental' disease, be conceptualized in terms of derangement of underlying physical mechanisms." Needed by the physician is only the language of physics and chemistry. Dr. Engel writes seven pages to show what is shut out by such assumptions, proposing the addition of psychic and social factors. He wants a "general systems" approach to teaching psychiatry, based on the admission that "The boundaries between health and disease, between well and sick, are far from clear and never will be clear, for they are diffused by cultural, social, and psychological considerations." This is a medical educator's view of the situation described by Jacob Needleman on page 2. But Mr. Needleman writes as an individual observer and inquirer, without expectations of fitting what he has to say into a medical school curriculum.

A third commentary on the psychiatric scene was given a year or so ago by Norman Cousins (*Saturday Review*, Feb. 21, 1976). Mr. Cousins surveyed the extent of mental illness in America, emphasizing the lack of agreement among doctors concerning both diagnosis and treatment, and remarking that a patient's chance of improvement is no better than the chance of those who have no treatment at all. This, he added, applies to a group of sufferers who are more numerous than those afflicted by cancer and advanced tuberculosis.

In effect, Mr. Cousins is saying to the psychiatrists: "Get your house in order," but isn't this a little like expecting the police departments

of the nation to do away with crime? In his *Science* article Dr. Engel lists the formidable obstacles to any significant revision in biomedical dogmatism, mainly various forms of institutional self-interest. How, then, can the consensus needed for curriculum reform be obtained? Since the insight and inspiration needed are individual qualities which leave consensus behind—break with it, challenge it—how can such elements ever be converted into course units? This seems a paramedical truth which should pervade the beginning, the middle, and the end of all medical education.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

WE have from a reader some rather wonderful material on doing things with children which appeared in *Liberation* for November, 1963. The writer is Mabel Chrystie, who tells about what went on at the Collaberg School, started in 1961 by Bob Barker in Stony Point, Rockland County, New York, and which continued for nine years. Paul Goodman was a trustee of the school. John Holt taught there for a time, until he went to the city (New York) to help start the First Street School.

The paragraphs which follow stand quite well by themselves.

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Children need help from teachers because the activity of 8-9-10-11-year-olds is often too complicated for them to accomplish. They can't manage the materials. They need different places to play in. They need adults who will converse, supply words, tell of themselves, and listen. In stores, shops, and factories children need guides because they are unwelcome. I act as a bulwark between exaggerated fears that they are unsafe, destructive, and need supervision. The adults of King Brothers Circus, who are used to children watching them work, were fine teachers. Children helped where they could wash an animal, adults cooperated with the children feeding the elephant, adults admonished children or told them to get out of the way in ways that showed their observation of individual children.

* * *

The complicated motives of adults are the environment of young children; it is as if they have doctorates in the subject. I never feel as accurately admired or criticized as I am by children. Children get to know well, at our school, a larger number of adults than they know at home. Those whose parents work at the school gain data in the school setting for understanding their parents.

* * *

We do things with children. The first edition of a school bulletin was a picture edition, the second was edited by an adult, the third by children. An adult directed one skit, acted a part in another, and led the dance in a third. An adult helped a child make an electric noise-making machine that neither of them could have made alone. They helped me make a mouse cage and I helped them make mouse cages, each one different—and two alike when the design was satisfactory. They were printing words on the ceiling to decorate it. The adult grabbed the child's hand to guide it when the letter was going in the wrong place.

* * *

Perhaps children know the mechanics of the world poorly because their own physical strength is small and keeps changing. They have seen all things moved by adults, with no accurate way of judging the amount of force involved. The young child can't experience differences in weight—and what about a complex of forces to a child who doesn't appreciate different sources? Children have to test the world, each with his own strength, to feel securely at home with their interpretation of it.

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I am scornful of the popular culture that interests children: popular songs, TV, monster comics, popsicles and bubble gum, jet models, model engines, horses, homemade paper dolls, Nancy Drew mysteries. This culture is not exclusive, however. I listen suddenly when I hear one child ask another, "Does that god have six arms or eight?" There is an encyclopedic, detailed, disinterested quality about their knowledge, and they learn it by telling. In a continual reorganization they make the world. They do ask. They ask each other and they ask adults whom they like. They ask about things that are familiar. They ask for what they need, for words they forget, just as they ask for band-aids. I think children and adults with a high tolerance for fear ask a lot. But mostly they tell, and learn by telling. It is tragic to prevent children from talking.

Children play and fool around with great intelligence, it seems to me. In fact it's hard for adults to live in the tropical atmosphere of children's

play and activity. Continuity, follow-up, review, and integration happen naturally. I teach writing to kindergartners and then I forget about it for five months because it is important that they integrate their learning with other activity and experience. There are a myriad of continuums in the making all the time, only a few of which I am aware of or a party to.

We found scraps of cloth on the dump. Children made costumes and also bandages and slings. In a comedy-tragedy class, children were asked to change as they crossed a boundary. One child gave a performance that impressed them all, of a person becoming blind. A few months later, children were walking around one afternoon with their eyes closed, tapping sticks.

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Four boys didn't want to go to class to write stories or to learn the recorder, so being left out they were disgruntled. They badgered a smaller boy who had a new tool. "I'll show you how to use it," said the first. "I want it," said the second. And the third took it. An adult was there, so the small boy got it back. Still wanting to have their fight, the four had a chance, and I grabbed the chance to have it with them. I came outdoors to empty my wastebasket and they threw snowballs. I stayed and told them to use the old chair for a target, that they need practice, and I put the wastebasket over my head for protection.

[A reader, who found the idea of someone like Vinoba teaching in the environment of Western culture somewhat incredible (MANAS, March 9)—apparently neglecting the possibility that such a man would find ways of adapting to conditions here—writes interestingly of his experiences in teaching in adult education on the Eastern seaboard.]

Speaking from two decades of experience as a teacher, I am convinced that the real culprit in the West is *compulsory* education and *premature* education: by that I mean we teach the young who should be working, and we ignore the older persons who are working when they should be learning. One of the great successes of American education is the runaway growth—with proven results—of the credit-free extension courses often offered at the junior college and community college level. I teach

several such courses in small craft navigation. My students are of all ages. They almost all own boats, from sailing dinghies to big yachts, and they give up three hours of a Saturday morning for ten Saturdays to learn how to stop running aground and getting lost.

We use the facilities of a spanking new community college. What is wrong with central air conditioning, formica, glass, and stainless steel, and nicely lit rooms with broad tables to spread our charts upon?

Across the hall my not-too distant neighbor teaches field ornithology, again to a motley crew, and little time is spent in the classroom. Local history buffs conduct classes in the areas of their expertise. Over a hundred of such non-credit courses run throughout the week, and we teachers who teach them revel in delights unknown to our 9-to-3 colleagues who are beset by all the slings and arrows of bureaucratic education so well documented by Ivan Illich and John Holt and innumerable others. . . .

The point being made here, of course, is that our schools—yes, our publicly financed, bureaucratically run schools—are not simply bad things, per se, no matter what happens in them. . . . With a little common sense mingled with compassion, we in the West can have our gleaming school plants, our educational bureaus, and good education, too. We just need the right people (motivated people) taught at the right time, with every least scintilla of compulsion banished into the Comenian and Lockean limbos whence it came. Then we can take just pride in what we have accomplished, and not waste our energies in fruitless "utopian considerations" and iconoclasm.

FRONTIERS

Codes and Common Sense

TO THE EDITOR: I am writing in reaction to the *Frontiers* article (March 23) describing the conflict between the owner-builder and building codes and inspectors. I feel that this issue is important enough in itself to warrant comment, but also because it is an appropriate metaphor of the conflict between individual and community in twentieth-century America. While reading the article I couldn't help but think of A. S. Neill's *Freedom not License*.

I write this letter wearing a number of hats. First, as a practicing registered architect; second, as a member of a local town planning board; but also third, as a "de-professional" who has a one-man architectural practice in my home, limited to the design of low-cost efficient buildings, and who, through a series of courses during the past four years, has conducted workshops on the owner-designed and owner-built home.

Building codes have as a primary concept and intent the protection of public health, safety, and welfare. The complexity of building codes is a function of the population density of the community in which they are adopted. There are still rural areas in the U.S. that don't have a building code (I live in a village of 2500 people that does not have a code). I would also point out that the procedure for adopting a building code is a public one—*i.e.*, the townspeople either directly vote on a code adoption or indirectly elect the town officials who do. I personally feel that the major issue here is population mobility, which is usually correlated to population density. Because of this mobility the turnover rate on houses is approaching that of cars in areas of high density. For this reason, I feel that it is necessary to have someone responsible and therefore liable for the inspection of the building integrity.

So the real question is, "Who is that someone?"

On single-family, owner-built homes, can it be the owner and/or builder? Yes, but only so long as that home is never sold to another person, for it is not reasonable to expect a home buyer to be qualified to determine the quality of its construction. I once thought of the idea of requiring inspection of homes only as a part of a sales transaction, but it is impossible to inspect the areas of structure, plumbing, electrical and mechanical installations, once they have been hidden by interior finishes. That is why, logically, the inspection is done during construction. Usually there are three required inspections on a building governed by code: (1) structural (framing end foundations); (2) electrical; and (3) plumbing and mechanical equipment (heating systems). You have the choice as to whether you have electricity or not, but if you do, then the code is enforced.

As I see it, there are just a few of options governing codes and inspections:

1. No codes, and no inspections. This is appropriate and exists in areas of low population density.
2. Inspection by some public official on codes adopted by a particular community, but limited solely to the areas of structure, electrical, plumbing, and mechanical installations.
3. The requirement that the major building trades activities be carried on by registered tradespeople. This might be appropriate for commercial, institutional, etc., structures, but I feel that it is totally inappropriate for single-family residences.
4. Self-inspection of owner-built homes. Appropriate, so long as that building is never sold or leased to another person.

My own recommendation is that if a community has voted to adopt a building code, it require a qualified official to inspect the building at the end of framing, wiring, and plumbing; that the owner-builder be allowed to do all the work involved in the construction of a single-family

residence. The quality and code compliance of that work would be insured by an inspection from a qualified official. I will forevermore support the freedom of the owner-builder to do every single part of the erection of structures for his own use. I cannot support the right to self-inspection if the home is to become the property of anyone else.

I am speaking here only on the issue of single-family residences. None of these attitudes apply to zoning regulations. A large percentage of current zoning laws have nothing whatever to do with public health, safety, or welfare. Their future will be determined by the courts.

The real question, perhaps, is: "Does a town have the right to impose a building code on the owner-builder?" I guess that I think they do; and any law is useless unless it has some method of enforcement (in this case inspection). What is the responsibility of a "mobile" town? Doesn't it assure its future safety and healthfulness by adopting a code and inspection proceedings for its future inhabitants, even if they aren't stable, but a very mobile and changing mix of people? What we are really discussing is the appropriateness of laws for a mobile society rather than the simpler, stable one.

I would also point out that the private sector will govern itself if the public doesn't assume the responsibility. If we didn't have these codes, the banks and insurance companies would establish their own codes and inspections (they already do so). Maybe such private systems could be completely self-regulating, but something inside of me reacts nervously to this.

What is the balance point between the individual and the community? Can we be free and self-regulating (responsible)? As long as we *know* what we are doing, yes. But who else can know if we know what we are doing?

Wilton, New Hampshire

FRANK BROOKSHIRE