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WHAT DETERMINES OUR DECISIONS?

WHAT is the "good life"? Would most people say in reply that the good life is both comfortable and fulfilling? Socrates, doubtless, would have disagreed. The good life, he would have said, means living a life of doing what is right, though the heavens fall on you. He, being an expert arguer, was able to extract verbal assent from a number of Athenians, but few there were who really accepted his view except for Plato. Through the centuries Socrates has been made famous by people quoting him, admiring his principles, trying to explain him to the young, but he has had very few imitators, or rather emulators.

A book that came in recently for review is titled simply *The Good Life.* The author is listed as Yi-Fu Tuan, and the jacket flap explains that he is John Kirkland Wright, professor of Geography at the University of Wisconsin, in Madison. (The publisher is the University of Wisconsin Press, and the price is $19.95.) There is no final answer to the question of the title in this book, although there is treatment of the whole range of ideas which people have of the good life. But if we take the question seriously, admitting at the outset that we don't know the answer, we see that there are other questions which need to be settled first, such as, Does human life have a purpose? and can it be generalized as belonging to all human beings, or is this not possible since the good life often seems to be the fulfillment of human desire, which may have widely contradictory expressions? Then there is the painful fact that a large portion of the world's population must devote virtually all their energy to solving the problem of survival, and for them simply being alive is in effect the good life.

Yet there have been those—exceptional men and women—who early in life set out to live in a certain way, by principles fully or only intuitively formulated, and were consistent with their convictions until they died. Were they ' happy"? Apparently, in their decisions they set integrity far above happiness on the scale of achievement. Should we then eliminate happiness as a criterion of the good life? Either that, or give the word "happiness" additional meanings that it does not ordinarily convey.

Another question that needs to be answered is: What is a human being? This is immediately followed by another:

Who should we take as samples or models of the human being? Jesus or Judas, Hitler or, say, Schweitzer?

A social scientist, confronted by this question, might very well say that we should not go to extremes but choose an *average* man or human, typical of the race as we are, to see what the good life is. Yet an eminent psychologist, A. H. Maslow, took a different view. Discussing health and pathology at the beginning of his last volume, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature,* published in 1971, a year after his death, he said:

> If I ask the question, "Of what are human beings capable?" I put the question to [a] small and selected superior group rather than to the whole population. I think that the main reason that hedonistic value theories and ethical theories have failed throughout history has been that the philosophers have locked in pathologically motivated pleasures with healthily motivated pleasures and struck an average of what amounts to indiscriminately sick and healthy, indiscriminately good and bad specimens, good and bad choosers, biologically sound and biologically unsound specimens.
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> If we want to answer the question how tall can the human species grow, then obviously it is well to pick out the ones who are already tallest and study them. If we want to know how fast a human being can run, then it is no use to average out the speed of a "good sample" of the population; it is far better to collect Olympic gold medal winners and see how well they can do. If we want to know the possibilities for spiritual growth, value growth, or moral development

> in human beings, then I maintain that we can learn most by studying our most moral, ethical, or saintly people.
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> On the whole, I think it fair to say that human history is a record of the ways in which human nature has been sold short. The highest possibilities of human nature have practically always been underrated. Even when "good specimens," the saints and sages and great leaders of history, have been available for study, the temptation too often has been to consider them not human but supernaturally endowed.

Perhaps we should say that for most people the good life is the recognition of goals, their pursuit and at least partial achievement. But we must add that the goals adopted by numerous individuals are of the sort that, if reached, will mean the defeat and frustration of other people. Then there are some who, recognizing this, or even without thinking much about it, choose goals which serve the needs and wants of others. Abe Lincoln was a man like that. So was Henry George. And Jane Addams was a woman like that. To such people, the goals of the great majority were simply irrelevant. Why? We could say that there are those in whom the sense of self had grown inclusive of others, its radius had expanded to the point where they could not enjoy a good life unless it was shared. How are we to understand the reality of such differences in human beings?

Well, first of all we must say that human beings are not simple and single, but each one is a mix of complexities, an embodiment of high and low intentions. Should we say both selfish and unselfish? It doesn't seem quite right to call a man selfish because he has never thought at all about the quality of life around him beyond the periphery of his own self-interest. Yet it is conceivable that such an individual, if he has a certain order of experience, will begin to think about the welfare of others. How might this happen? Well, if he should fall in love, the welfare of the loved one becomes important to him. His idea of the self has grown, with it the area of his concern. Then, if he should have a family, there is a widened circle of interest. And there are those whose sense of family includes the whole community where they live. Extensions of the sense of self could go on and on—to the nation, and finally, to all the world and all who live there, including the plants and animals, the seas and streams, all the phenomena of nature. The good life, then, is more like a series of concentric circles of concern than a single ring. We might say these circles are determined by radii of maturity of being. Conceivably, one moves from ring to ring by growth in awareness and the inclusiveness of one's love. But this obviously means that the good life for one cannot possibly be the good life for another, in many, many instances. On the other hand, there may be large numbers of people whose progress in moving from ring to ring is approximately the same, and who therefore think more or less alike concerning their lives. This commonality of views makes orthodoxy. What shall we say about those few individuals who are able, willing, and eager to be teachers of those on the lower rings? What kind of wisdom is required of a teacher, say, of ten-year-olds, in order to speak to their condition yet not foreclose on development to higher rings of relationships and responsibilities? Is this perhaps an explanation of the "mysteries" that seem to be part of all the high religions of the world? And would the rigidities of belief which institutional religions acquire, almost without exception, also be explained in this way, by the human inability to remain open to higher possibilities because of the longing for absolute certainty where we are now?

One sees from these reflections the danger in a single definition of the "good life." Every good religion, then, must have an escape hatch from the orthodoxy which has grown up around its system of beliefs. Every true teaching can remain true only by having octaves of meaning within or behind its tenets. Those who come to realize this sooner or later drop out of membership in all orthodoxies, although they may continue being "religious" in a profounder sense.

There are other problems. We used to talk a lot about "social progress," and pride ourselves on our social attainments, but not so much today. Are the nuclear powers of today morally on a higher plane than the barbarian hordes who sacked the great cities of the East and invaded the fringes of Europe in the West? Are our technologies of comfort and convenience an advance in civilization or no more than hedonistic refinement of cruder means? It is easy enough in the present to find reasons for castigating ourselves, but wouldn't it be more reasonable to say simply that our evolution moves very slowly. If there is true development among human beings, it becomes very difficult to see how it takes place, especially within the compass of the few thousand years of our historical period. But if human development is both moral and intellectual, and hardly biological at all, save for a measure of refinement, then we certainly need more time to move from one ring to another. Our only resource in this case lies in myth and metaphysics. We say this because the moral aspect of human beings is certainly not physical; it grows out of a deepening of consciousness and a sense of brotherhood which alters our sense of self and leads to ethical behavior. What is it that changes in us? We hardly know save that the word "soul" seems as good a way as any to describe the organ (metaphysical) of change. It is reasonable—it comes to us naturally—to speak of world-remembered religious teachers as Great Souls. How if they were human, did they get that way? Why are their words, recorded, we say, in the words of Great Scriptures, so unforgettable? What in us resounds to those words and makes us repeat them? Is it our souls, and are the souls immortal?

We spoke of help from myth. An example is found on the last pages of Plato's *Republic,* where Socrates recites the Myth of Er—a man who apparently had a "near-death" experience and returned to tell about the fate of souls who had formerly lived on earth. They were brought, he said, before the Fates, Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos, and invited to choose their next life on earth, with a number of patterns of life made available to them. Some chose wisely, others foolishly, deciding for a tyrant's career which would subject them to terrible misery, yet once they had chosen they could not change their fate. This led Socrates to say:

> And there, dear Glaucon, it appears, is the supreme hazard for a man. And this is the chief reason why it should be our main concern that each of us, neglecting all other studies, should seek after and study this thing—if in any way he may be able to learn of and discover the man who will give him the ability and the knowledge to distinguish the life that is good from that which is bad, and always and everywhere to choose the best that the conditions allow, and, taking into account all the things of which we have spoken and estimating the effect on the goodness of his life, of their conjunction or their severance, to know how beauty commingled with poverty or wealth and combined with what habit the soul operates for good or for evil, and what are the effects of high and low birth and private station and office and strength and weakness and quickness of apprehension and dullness and all similar and acquired habits of the soul, when blended and combined with one another, so that with consideration of all these things he will be able to make a reasoned choice between the better and the worse life, with his eyes fixed on the nature of his soul, naming the worse life that which will tend to make it more unjust and the better that which will make it more just. But all other considerations he will dismiss, for we have seen that this is the best choice, for both life and death. And a man must take with him to the house of death an adamantine faith in this, that even there he may be undazzled by riches and similar trumpery, and may not precipitate himself into tyrannies and similar doings and so work many evils past cure and suffer still greater himself, but may know how always to choose in such things the life that is seated in the mean and shun the excess in either direction, both in this world so far as may be and in all the life to come, for this is the greatest happiness for man.

Thus, according to Plato, we work out our destiny through many lives on earth, reincarnating again and again for further experience until we reach that stage of maturity where we no longer have desires and wants, and then, if we choose,

become the teachers of mankind. The *Bhagavad-Gita,* the philosophical heart of the *Mahabharata,* India's greatest epic, teaches the same thing. At the opening of the fourth discourse of the *Gita,* Krishna, the Teacher of that time, tells Arjuna that he has taught the ideas of the *Gita* from the beginning of time, imparting them to Ikshwaku, the founder of the Indian solar dynasty. His disciple then asks: "Seeing that thy birth is posterior to the life of Ikshwaku, how am I to understand that thou wert in the beginning the teacher of this doctrine?" Krishna replies:

> "Both I and thou have passed through many births, O harasser of thy foes! Mine are known unto me, but thou knowest not of thine.
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> "Even though myself unborn, of changeless essence, and the lord of all existence, yet in presiding over nature—which is mine—I am born but through my own *maya,* the mystic power of self-ideation, the eternal thought in the eternal mind. I produce myself among creatures, O son of Bharata, whenever there is a decline of virtue and an insurrection of vice and injustice in the world, and thus I incarnate from age to age for the preservation of the just, the destruction of the wicked, and the establishment of righteousness. Whoever, O Arjuna, knoweth my divine birth and actions to be even so doth not upon quitting his mortal frame enter into another, for he entereth into me. Many were free from craving, fear, and anger, filled with my spirit, and who depended upon me, having been purified by the ascetic fire of knowledge, have entered into my being. In whatever way men approach me, in that way do I assist them; but whatever the path chosen by mankind, that path is mine, O son of Pritha.

These are the foundations of a world view, found in Indian philosophy and in Plato, accepted and promulgated by a long roll of serious thinkers, abandoned in recent centuries by a number of tough-minded iconoclasts of Bacoolan and Cartesian persuasion, but now reviving among thoughtful men and women everywhere who, having assimilated what is good in Western modern thought, are still finding it necessary to make some sense out of their own lives. Two writers in this country, Joseph Head and S. L. Cranston, a few years ago, put together an anthology on the subject of reincarnation. In its latest edition—*Reincarnation: The Phoenix Fire Mystery* (Julian Press, 1977)—they quote at the beginning of their book from W. Macneile Dixon, a brilliant English essayist (from his *The Human Situation,* first published in 1937), the following:

> Immortality is a word which stands for the stability and permanence of that unique and precious quality we discern in the soul, which, if lost, leaves nothing worth preservation in the world. Give assurance that what death appears to proclaim is not so, and the scene is changed. The sky brightens, the door is left open for unimagined possibilities, things begin to fall into an intelligible pattern. If you have not here among men who reflect, however unwilling they are to acknowledge it, the pivot of the human situation, the question upon the answer to which all turns, I know not where to look for it.
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> What kind of immortality is at all conceivable? Of all doctrines of a future life, palingenesis or rebirth, which carries with it the idea of pre-existence, is by far the most ancient and widely held, "the only system to which," as said Hume, "philosophy can hearken."
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> Our interest in the future, how strange it is if we can never hope to see the future. That interest rarely seems to desert us, and in itself appears inexplicable were we not possessed of an intuition which tells us that we shall have a part in it, that in some sense it already belongs to us, that we should bear it continually in mind, since it will be ours. So closely are all human ideals associated with futurity that, in the absence of the faith that man is an immortal being, it seems doubtful whether they could ever have come to birth. . . .
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> According to Plato's theory of reminiscence, our present knowledge is a recollection of what was learnt or known by the soul in a previous state. You will say, it has no knowledge of its previous lives. But what man remembers every day of this life? And lost memories, as the psychologists will tell you, are recoverable. For the memory appears to be a palimpsest, from which nothing is ever obliterated. If we have forgotten most days and incidents of our present lives it is natural that memories of previous lives should fail us. Yet from infancy every forgotten day and hour has added to our experiences, to our growth and capacity, made its contribution to the mind and soul. So it may be with former lives, each of them but a day in our past history. . . . Man may be more interesting and important than our modern

> teachers suppose, possibly even a star of some magnitude in the celestial universe.

Should an account of the good life be given without attention to this perspective? There are those, of course, who find goodness of life dependent upon the inclusion of the perspective of eternity. The Stoics were men of this sort, who said little or nothing of immortality, yet lived lives consistent with this idea. This dimension creeps into the work of virtually all genuinely humanist writers, as for example in Yi-Fu Tuan, whose book we referred to at the beginning of this discussion. In his summing up he says:

> Seeing beauty in nature or in an artwork may well produce a sense of physical well-being, but it is also a forgetfulness of self and a grateful awareness of the pure existence of another. In social encounters, how should we characterize the genuine pleasure we feel? Surely "good," with its moral tone, is a more accurate epithet than words from an esthetic lexicon that lack all moral ballast. . . . "Good" and "moral" have a natural affinity for each other, but they are not identical. The moral life is more committed, narrower, and more heroic than is the good life, with which we have been concerned.

There are inner voices which speak to us about the good life. They may speak loud, or only intimately, while other claims may be vociferous. There are several orders of desire. Distinguishing among them is a central task before us all.

REVIEW
COMMENT, THEN A REVIEW

IN these days of ever-increasing anxiety over the threat of nuclear war, and the unwillingness or inability of governments to take steps that might prevent it, a growing number of books on the subject are coming out. Will they, one wonders, have any effect? Is writing books the best thing that one can do? How are people influenced to think more constructively about securing a future for the world? Should you walk for peace, shout for it, weep for it, demonstrate for it, or write books and articles about it? Should we collect pithy sayings about peacemaking by eminent men and women and publish them in pamphlets and spread them around?

Many of the books about making an end to war say much the same thing—things that no doubt need repeating. They say, for example, that fear is the real enemy that keeps the arms race going. Fear, certainly, is what started it, but now there is a powerful group of manufacturers who make their living—and a lot more than a living—out of the arms race, along with some scientists and technological experts for whom the development of weapons has provided a well-paying career. Politicians get money for their campaigns from businessmen of this sort and a spurious sort of "democratic" approval of the idea of being better and more dangerously armed than any other nation comes into being, based upon the hackneyed slogans of the past. There have been books—good ones—about all these things. Such reading leads to the conclusion reached by a wise man centuries ago—"All men desire peace, but few men desire those things which make for peace." Meanwhile the books keep coming in for review.

What if having peace means changing our lives at and from their roots, and letting the politics come as it will as a result? There are people in the world—a few—for whom war is unthinkable and impossible. Where did they come from and why are they among us? It might be well to have a few books about them, just to clear the air. Actually, we already have a few such books, and we keep on recommending them in these pages. But the best of them are not about war and other grisly acts which are a part of war's natural harvest. They are about a meaningful life and how it may be pursued. We are thinking, of course, about Henry David Thoreau, his essay on Civil Disobedience and another on "Life Without Principle," the first written in 1848, the other in the 1850s. There are two paragraphs in "Life Without Principle" which illustrate Thoreau's way of clearing the air:

> I do not know but it is too much to read one newspaper a week. I have tried it recently, and for so long it seems to me that I have not dwelt in my native region. The sun, the clouds, the snow, the trees say not so much to me. You cannot serve two masters. It requires more than a day's devotion to know and possess the wealth of a day.
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> We may well be ashamed to tell what things we have read or heard in our day. I do not know why my news should be so trivial,—considering what one's dreams and expectations are, why the developments should be so paltry. The news we hear, for the most part, is not news to our genius. It is the stalest repetition. You are often tempted to ask, why such stress is laid on a particular experience which you have had,—that, after twenty-five years, you should meet Hobbins, Registrar of Deeds, again on the sidewalk. Have you not budged an inch, then? Such is the daily news. Its facts appear to float in the atmosphere, insignificant as the sporules of fungi, and impinge upon some neglected *thallus*, or surface of our minds, which affords a basis for them, and hence a parasitic growth. We should wash ourselves clean of such news. Of what consequence, though our planet explode, if there is no character in the explosion? In health we have not the least curiosity about such events. We do not live for idle amusement. I would not run around a corner to see the world blow up.

Already what is natural to Thoreau has placed us under quite a strain. What sort of man was he, who found the daily news unworthy of attention? To whom survival counted for nothing unless there is some character in it? Such questions are

not a way of deprecating the ways and thoughts of the great majority of human beings, but an avenue to wondering if in fact further evolution is possible for the human species, and if it is likely to be in the area of realizing a higher meaning in human life, as possibly represented by men like Thoreau.

We have for review a large book (432 pages) which deals with the threat to human life of nuclear industry and preparation for nuclear war. The author is Rosalie Bertell, a woman who has worked in cancer research. An expert on the effects on the body of radioactivity, she now researches low-level radiation for the International Institute of Concern for Public Health in Toronto, Canada. Her book is titled *No Immediate Danger*, but intended to show that the opposite is the case. The publisher is The Book Publishing Co., Summertown, Tennessee 38483, the price (in paperback), $11.95.

She wrote this book, she says in her Preface, "to share with others my understanding of the biological effects of exposure to ionising radiation, an integral part of the technology now being used to produce both nuclear power and nuclear weapons." She continues:

> My most compelling personal reason for undertaking this task is that—at this stage—only scientists are fully aware of the subtle cumulative nature of damage from low-level radiation and of the prolonged waiting time before such damage becomes obvious in an individual, in his or her children, or—as the American Indians say—in our great-grandchildren's great grandchildren. I have been grieving for the 16 million casualties already produced by our nuclear industries and weapon-testing and I believe their tragedies must be made visible and be clearly known by everyone. . . .
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> My frustration with the mindless assurance which automatically follows every nuclear accident or radiation spill, namely, that there is "no immediate danger," can be quickly grasped. A greater effort is required, however, to learn the unfamiliar jargon, to grasp in detail the human health implications of radiation exposure and to understand nuclear technology. But this is necessary if we are—together—to give visible form and expression to a global consensus now birthing against nuclear options. It is only the full realization of our shared self-destructive behavior, whether of Eastern or Western bloc, northern or southern hemisphere, which can adequately move us to change.

A long section in this book describes the various forms radiation may take and the insufficiency of records concerning the exposure of workers. The matter of "permissible doses" is discussed at length, with emphasis on how such levels are established. Generally they are determined by physicists, not by doctors or health specialists. Originally, "the standards for worker and public exposure to radiation were developed by the Manhattan Project (i.e. World War II atomic bomb project), physicists from Canada, Britain and the U.S.A. in 1950. They set the levels with the goal of encouraging the development of nuclear industries. With this act, the nuclear physicists became the source of radiation health information although they had no health credentials." In making such judgments, the threat to individual human health was measured against the estimated benefit to society of subjecting people working in the nuclear industries to calculated risks. Arrangements of this sort lead Rosalie Bertell to say:

> The usual "rational" approach to risk versus benefit planning by governments is irrational from the point of view of the individual. It undermines the individual's ability to control and understand his or her environment and to hold government accountable to its electorate.
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> The human body is delicately fashioned and the unique gifts of each person are meant to enrich the human family. Crude quantification of random damage to people which is used to justify political or military gains of the nation may be labelled sophisticated barbarism. It is the decadent thinking of those who have accepted the rule of force and who envision a future earth ruled by a powerful country (the U.S.A. or the U.S.S.R.) with a monopoly of weapons of mass destruction, able to terrorize all other nations into cooperating with some form of global economy and resource-sharing of their choosing.

This seems inevitable so long as we have large nations which engage in power struggles

with one another. The leaders and administrators of such countries too easily lose both their common sense and their humanity. The same thing happens to brainy people. As the writer says:

> "Think tanks" trying to imagine a world with "permanent peace" decided that while the state of world peace might be possible theoretically, and while many people would see it as desirable, the transition to a state of peace was not desirable and the state of peace would not be "in the best interest of a stable society." Think-tank members found poverty and unemployment necessary to maintain discipline and a reserve labor pool, military training to be a social service program for undisciplined young men and war to be a means to reduce "overpopulation." Obviously, these opinions were not for common consumption because "ordinary people" would not understand. The rift between governing and governed in democratic societies grew larger, the realm of secrecy widened, and tensions within nations rivalled tension between nations in intensity.

We bring our hardly adequate review of this book to a close by quoting from the last chapter:

> We have tried to analyze the interdependence of the triad: national security, energy and health. It is time to say one last word about deteriorating health, the strongest indicator of self-destructive human behavior. As we examine global health problems already spawned by the preparations for global war—the Third World War—certain victimized peoples claim our immediate serious attention. By ignoring their plight and feigning helplessness we are being brutalized and prepared for still greater hostilities and destruction. Global healing must involve global attention to the past military addiction, admission of complicity or passivity and involvement in future policy development to maximize the survival probability of the victimized peoples. These victims are our brothers and sisters. They are unique jewels, adding irreplaceable value to our global family and home.

COMMENTARY
HEALTHY SEEDS

THROUGH the years, we have tried to keep track of the work of Ecology Action since its beginnings in Palo Alto, Calif., and later at its larger headquarters in Willits north of San Francisco—5798 Ridgewood Road, Willits, Calif. 95490. We now have a copy of Ecology Action's 1987 catalog, listing seeds and books and a few other products they have developed. The opening statement should be of general interest to those interested in a productive home garden:

> For over 14 years, we have been developing the methods of the smallest and least demanding "mini-farm" that will *sustainably* maintain a family in full health, or in larger plots as market gardens to supply a community. Our development work comes from one of the oldest long-range organic research projects in the country, and is linked with similar projects in over 100 countries.
>
> Since 1972, our work with biointensive food-raising has reaped enormous returns for home gardeners. Indications are that a gardener may be able to grow his or her own 322 pounds of vegetables and soft fruits in a six-month growing season on as little as one hundred square feet—half the size of an average kitchen. Using the "method" one needs to spend only a few minutes in the garden each day, water and weed one-fourth as much, and spend far less effort.
>
> All of this is possible while your soil's fertility is greatly improved on a sustainable basis. With good market conditions, it should be possible for mini-farmers to make a living on as little as one-eighth of an acre.
>
> Our educational program presents classes both in Willits and at our urban center in Palo Alto. We have become a key garden publisher, producing four major books and over a dozen working pamphlets on such subjects as: raising your own fertilizers, growing your own seed, and biointensive apprenticeship possibilities. Our work has also been written up in virtually every major newspaper and magazine in the United States. . . .
>
> Ecology Action's educational work has always generated much of its needed funding, but it has always been limited in fully distributing its findings where they have been needed most. Furthermore, the training of farmer-teachers is also limited, while requests for trained gardener/mini-farmers continue to grow worldwide. Bountiful Gardens now provides us with some increasing revenue for this important work while providing domestic gardeners with the best available products for their gardening pleasure, but more is needed.
>
> The easiest way to support our work is to buy from this catalog, and if you like our products, purchase more.

The catalog lists seeds for more than 200 plants—vegetables and grains. The seeds are all organically grown, open-pollinated and untreated. John Jeavons, founder and developer of Ecology Action, calls the catalog "an extension of our retail store, where the best in organic products are available, and knowledgeable gardners are your salespersons."

Write for this catalog at the address given above.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ON TEACHING AT HOME

THE argument about home schooling—and as parents who start in doing it soon discover, there *is* an argument—often based, for the school administrators, on assumptions growing out of current practice in the public schools, and not on an independently worked out conception of how a child thinks and learns. The problem of the parents is to get the administrators to move out of the habitual patterns stamped on their minds by the system evolved by the schools—often in response to organizational needs which have nothing to do with education—and to recognize the unique values which teaching at home may provide. The *Country Journal* for December, 1986, has an article by Becky Rupp which explores these advantages of home schooling. Saying that she and her husband plan to teach their three boys at home when the time comes, she begins by showing the growth of the home-schooling movement. She says:

> Today, some 20,000 to 50,000 children are part of a movement that has been gaining impetus over the last decade—and doubling, tripling, or even quadrupling in the last three years, school officials estimate. Actually, no one is sure just how many families practice home schooling nationwide, because many home schoolers are lying low in order to avoid repressive school boards. The Michigan department of education reports 1,200 home schoolers. Wisconsin claims 600, Florida 1,300, New York 700, and Vermont 200—but those numbers, educators agree, probably err on the low side.
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> Parents' motives for teaching their children at home are legion. Perhaps as many as half of all home schoolers do so for religious reasons; others are dissatisfied with the education handed out by the public school and feel they can do a better job. Some pursue independent, self-sufficient styles of living that they feel conflict with institutional schooling. And some, like Becky Fox, simply want to spend more time with their children. "They were in school all day," she says of Mark, ten, and Jenny, eleven. "Then they would come home and do their homework. We hardly got to talk to each other, and I saw them only when they were tired." . . .
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> Home schooling was the educational norm for much of human history: It's only in the last 150 years or so that the public schools have gotten off the ground. And home schooling is still alive and well in areas of the country too isolated for easy access to public schools. A prime example is Alaska's state-funded Centralized Correspondence Study program, which has been available since 1939 to school-less rural children and since 1976 to families within reach of public schools but looking for educational alternatives. The Alaskan program, by traditional academic standards, is an unqualified success: the students consistently score higher than their public school peers on both national and state achievement tests, and the figures indicate that the longer students are in the home-study program, the better they do.

Becky Rupp gives the highlights of the legal fight to legitimize home schooling in the courts, then turns to the clear advantages of home schooling.

> Among the academic advantages of home schooling, the biggest, best, and most often cited is its flexibility. Children learning at home have lots of leeway. They are free to pursue their own interests and to learn at their own pace and in their own way. At home it's the kids who ask the questions rather than the teachers, and that new ground rule seems to produce a remarkably fertile atmosphere for learning. It sounds simple, but it is an important point. Unfortunately it is one that is often ignored or overlooked by the public schools. . . . The public schools lead a lot of horses to water, but the self-motivated home schoolers are the ones who drink.

What this writer calls "integrated learning" is something easily within reach of the home-schooling parent, but difficult if not impossible to the public school teacher who is supposed to transmit to the children "specified blocks of information in specified blocks of time."

> "A deep interest in just about anything," says one home-schooling parent, "leads just about anywhere." An example is one New York home-schooling family's experience in making maple syrup. They started by visiting some small-scale back-yard syrup makers to talk about the process and examine their equipment, then went to the library to find books—adult and juvenile—on the subject. They

identified and tapped their own maple trees, then constructed their own evaporator and collected sap, calculating along the way how much sap they collected per tree and how much syrup they could expect when they boiled it down. They learned about temperature, viscosity, and sugar concentration. They visited a large-scale commercial sugarhouse and compared it to their home operation. Finally they cooked up some pancakes and ate the result—and even had a parting shot at making maple-sugar candy. In one comprehensive lesson the family touched on history, engineering, mathematics, botany, physics, chemistry, and home economics. Integrated learning in a nutshell.

The maple syrup story, the writer points out, shows how home education helps children to relate to the adult world.

"Life school," one home-schooling advocate calls this—meaning that learning takes place in the context of daily living and builds and builds on what the child already knows and understands. Home schooling also provides lots of time for relaxed talk between parents and children, creating a "very powerful learning environment," according to a British study comparing home-taught and nursery-schooled four-year-olds. . . . Conversation at home, they found, covered a challenging range of topics, most of them generated by simple daily events—and the kids asked the questions. At school, exchanges were necessarily more restricted by a larger number of children vying for the time of one adult. Communication here was judged "educationally ineffective" by the researchers, who mentioned again that the lion's share of the questions were asked by the teachers.

Other considerations have importance:

There is also evidence that constant group interaction may not be all it's cracked up to be. [This is in relation to the claim that schools "socialize" the children.] Some children learn easily in group situations; others do not. For children who are more comfortable with fewer people around, home schooling can be a real advantage. In fact, a little more time alone may be helpful to most children. A recent report by the National Academy of Education's Commission on Reading states that school children today spend too little time reading and too much time filling out workbook exercises. The typical elementary-school classroom allows only 7 minutes a day for silent reading. As much as 70 per cent of the class time allotted to reading may be spent on workbooks, an activity that can run to as many as 1,000 pages a year. None of this—is likely, experts agree, to give children a love of reading, and one of the positive opportunities experienced by home-schooled children is having (at last) a chance to read.

Meanwhile, home-schoolers are usually able to provide the children with social experience. Forty-three of them said (in effect) in reply to a questionnaire:

Almost all home schoolers participate in extracurricular social activities: dancing, music, and art lessons, church groups, Scouts, 4-H, swimming, skiing, and karate lessons, soccer and basketball teams. In three families, the kids helped out with small home family businesses. Only two of the respondents felt that socialization was a problem: in both cases the kids were lonely at home and were planning returns to public school. Five families felt that their children were better and more realistically socialized because they were *not* in the artificial atmosphere of school. "Socialization," wrote one home schooler, "is a problem only in the minds of educators."

Becky Rupp concludes by saying: Information about many issues of interest to home schoolers is available from Holt Associates, 729 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116. Write for a sample copy of the newsletter, *Growing Without Schooling.*

FRONTIERS

Periodicals of Interest

THE MANAS exchanges (other papers with which we exchange copies) make a motley array of differing journalistic undertakings which have one thing in common—they all have interests and concerns which reach beyond the conventional motives for publishing. The Quaker papers, for example, reflect the centuries-old commitment of members of the Society of Friends to do what they can to reduce the misery and injustice which result from man's inhumanity to man, to bypass institutional remedies and to go directly to those who suffer and to try to alleviate their ills. The spirit in which this work is carried on grows out of a central Quaker principle—there is that of God in every human being—so that persistence and patience are qualities that seem always in evidence.

Then there are papers which represent broadly ecological purposes, such as the *Seedling News,* issued bi-monthly by TreePeople, a southern California group of mostly young people who plant trees in both the forests and cities of the region and carry on educational activities for schoolchildren (and adults as well) in behalf of the health of the environment. The founder of this group, Andy Lipkis, learned in school when he was about fifteen of the dying out of trees (mostly conifers) in the national forests near his home, as the result of air pollution due to smog, and resolved to do what he could about it. As the years went by, he organized tree-planting expeditions. obtaining seedlings wherever he could, and with crews of students and friends planted the baby trees in the San Bernardino National Forest and other locations. He secured the cooperation of the U.S. Forest Service, which came to appreciate what he was doing, and gained funds from large business corporations, also the loan of trucks and equipment, from various sources. The spirit of this work is illustrated in an article by Andy in the November/ December *Seedling News* (19601 Mulholland Drive, Beverly Hills, Calif. 90210):

> National newspapers are riddled with stories of drug abuse. Local papers quote pollution levels in Santa Monica that I fear will make it impossible for our daughter to enjoy the nearby beach.
>
> To me, the issues are closely related. Obviously society is polluting itself with drugs, but the connection is much more profound than that. Scientists define pollution as wasted energy. Instead of recycling it as nature does, we "throw it away." Except that it comes back . . . in the form of toxics, smog or, most recently, poison in our ocean. When energy is recycled, like compost, it "feeds" the earth, maintaining nature's balance and health.
>
> I think people work the same way. We're given energy but, as a society, we recycle very little. It can be used to solve problems, to heal, to change negative situations to positive. But if we don't use it, it becomes pollution in the form of confusion, apathy, cynicism. No wonder people need drugs to shut off those uncomfortable feelings. Chemicals, television, spectator sports. . . . Look at how much time and money is tied up in these various drug forms. What could be accomplished if a small portion was channeled into service?

A new exchange that came in recently is the *Gildea Review,* a 12-page paper issued by the Community Environmental Council of Santa Barbara, Calif. (930, Miramonte Drive, Santa Barbara, Calif. 93109), an organization that has accomplished so much in cleaning up the city, working out a productive recycling program, planting and exhibiting model gardens, and teaching interns from various countries, that visitors from all over the world come there to study the programs and methods that have been developed. One thing the Gildea people are doing is fulfilling a contract with the City of Santa Barbara to conduct a water conservation educational and promotional campaign.

The city's water supply is diminishing rapidly and all water users need to become conservation-minded. Inserts sent out with water bills have provided information on water-saving devices such as low-flow showerheads. An attractive poster on saving water was designed and

distributed widely for display, and drought-tolerant plants have been tagged by eight participating retail nurseries, as part of a landscaping and public education program. Gildea contacts all the elementary schools in the area, notifying teachers of a classroom water conservation program.

Paul Relis, Gildea's executive director, contributes an article on his visit to Soviet Russia to talk with officials about their environmental policies. He found that environmental protection is a matter of increasing importance to the Russians, as elsewhere in the world. In addition to official exchanges with Soviet administrators, he had opportunity to observe urban conditions in Russia, saying in his report:

> The Soviet cities are a striking contrast to those in the West. Development in the city proper is mostly residential—large apartment houses, which in huge cities like Moscow (population about 8.6 million) seem to extend to the horizon The overall urban density, however, appears much lower than in Western cities because Soviet planners have incorporated vast green areas in the city. From one's hotel room one gazes on what appears to be a park-like urban landscape. The city of Kiev, according to Soviet literature, claims to have more park area for its population than any city of equivalent size in the world. We found it to be a particularly beautiful city of well-manicured parks, fountains and wonderful quays along the Dniepper River.

Santa Barbara is a leader in the development of an urban recycling program, through the work of C.E.C. and now Gildea. Collection points of sorted items—newspapers, glass, cans—have been established and the people of the city are glad to cooperate.

> In Santa Barbara County 27 public schools have active recycling collection days that serve as fundraisers and also instill in the students a recycling ethic. . . . This year's recycling program for Santa Barbara will attempt to increase the amount of material recycled and extend the collection days to high schools in the county.

The *Gildea Review* is more than a newsletter—it's a small but interesting magazine.

The *High Country News*—published every two weeks in Paonia, Colorado—and read regularly by the MANAS editors, is issued for people who live in the Rocky Mountains and care about the countryside. In the issue at hand (last October 27) the publisher, Ed Marston, contributes a chapter in a series about the rivers of the region, this one on the Missouri, America's longest river, one of the widest and the muddiest. He writes with the sensibility of a bioregionalist, and there are other contributors to this study. A good bibliography of books on the Missouri is provided.