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THE IMPERFECT GENIUSES

WHY do people—sometimes the very brightest people—have an uncontrollable longing to dot every *i*, cross every *t*, and present to their friends and admirers an absolutely complete explanation of the universe? We could play with this question for a while, recalling the Cartesian suggestion (is it a rule?) that the greatest of minds are subject to the greatest aberrations; remembering the tyrannical egotism of Isaac Newton, how unfair he was to Leibniz, how merciless an intriguer against astronomers who helped him, but had less genius; and noting the incredible vanity of Victor Hugo, not to mention the apparently shameless self-justifications of Rousseau.

How do these contradictions of character fit with the question raised? They represent the human—the all too human—tendency to achieve or insist on finality in the obviously imperfect present, to make a closed and acceptable system out of the way things are *right now.*

It won't of course work; it never does; but what is the story of human history except the concerted attempt by the conventional leaders of every epoch to *make* it work?

Whom shall we take for examples of the unappreciated wise who know better than to try to make it work? Who, like Gödel, point out that in every closed system there is a fifth column of unrationalized assumptions, smuggled in—put there from impatient necessity—which cannot be explained in terms of the other, successfully rationalized assumptions, and which sooner or later will cause the system to break down, tomorrow or a hundred years from now. Who, like the traditional Navajo weaver, always puts a little "mistake" in the woof of the rug he is making, as a reminder of the fallibility of humankind. Like the institutionalized court jester who is allowed to mock his king from time to time, or like the menial philosopher who had one line to repeat endlessly to the victorious General riding his chariot through Roman streets, filled with cheering multitudes, followed by his triumphant legions coming home after another great conquest: *Never forget that you are only a man!*

Obviously, there is a lot of wisdom in folklore and custom—wisdom we have not learned how to apply except in some ritual way. But it's there, waiting for us to see the point. How did it get there, one wonders? This is a touchy, even a perilous question. One must beware of the shallow resolution of some easy mystique. Yet one ought to *try* to answer, exercising due caution.

What is due caution? Avoiding metaphysical definition, we might reply that the half-conscious devices of art embody due caution, hinting that there may be a final solution somewhere, but not here, not in *this* work of art, which is only a splendid attempt, a shy, incomplete symbol of the Great Mystery. Not the truth but one of its resonances. Not the sun, but a lunar reflection, honored for what it cannot accomplish, yet dares to suggest.

Tragedy, in short, is better than comedy because it combines vision with failure, making it faithful to the transient realities of human life. And what is failure? The play doesn't really say. It pricks to awaken a little the hidden nobility in the audience with the suggestion that the failure applies only to mortality, is superficial, while the vision is real; and, half believing, the audience shares in the catharsis intended by the genius who wrote the play. When Æschylus dumps Prometheus at the end of *Prometheus Bound,* we go down into the pit with the Titan, playacting the heroism we momentarily would like to possess;

which we sometimes imitate in various rhetorics when the spirit is upon us; which great men live out in life, to our awe and ineffaceable recollection, giving us something to tell our children about in days of palling mediocrity.

This seems enough playing around. Sooner or later we need to take some imperfect genius seriously. We delay because it is a painful undertaking. The discovery of imperfection always brings pain. The inventions of children and the lies of adults are ways of avoiding this pain. We admit this from time to time but we keep on doing it. How do you make something great out of imperfection, instead of doing awful things to conceal it—instead of, say, invading Cambodia? Instead of putting all the great old anarchists in prison and calling them *bandits,* as Lenin did to Emma Goldman?

That is our project, then, to accept the pain and try to make something out of it. We shall not succeed, of course. Only a very small success is possible. We are not really ready for Nirvana. Only by going to the very heart of pain and assimilating it can one abolish it, and then life itself is all, all over. The prospect of a final ending seems unbearable to most of us, making pain a preferable alternative. Enduring some pain is recognized as one way of getting into condition. The arts might be defined as deliberate exercises for getting into condition—for taking on the Promethean role.

Our focus is on Vico—Giambattista Vico. In a recent book Isaiah Berlin combines wonder with disillusionment at Vico. He gives you Vico with the bark on. It is a challenge to the faith. One wants so much to see revealed a flawless Vico, a philosopher and teacher for all ages. But Vico isn't that. In application his truths contract to half-truths, his formulas are inadequate, his confidence in his system pressed beyond endurance. Why didn't he *stop* at the right place? Because he was only a man. Because he was determined to dot every *i* and cross every *t.* Because he wanted to make his glorious "intuitions" square certain circles right then in the early eighteenth century, and this was simply impossible. He should have been born today, when we know so much more about everything!

What was great about Vico can be reduced to a familiar cliché. He said that people "learn by doing." But in his hands the cliché becomes an Open Sesame. He was the first modern European (he died in 1744), you might say, to declare this truism. He said that we really know only what we ourselves create. Knowledge without personal mastery of what is known remains hearsay, and for reliable hearsay you need Revelation. God knows about the world because he made it. We know about mathematics because *we* made that. What is it to "make" mathematics? Mathematics is the reflected outline of the peregrinations of the Many. Of Equality and More Than and Less Than. Of useful (but ridiculous) manipulations of Infinity (the One). It is the science of relationships. Did Euclid "make" geometry? What is "making"? And those later fellows who created non-Euclidean geometry—did they make that? In some sense they did. Or did they just "discover" it? We must let this go.

Vico also said something else—that the social world is the work of men. Ergo, we can know the social world. Having made it, we can know it. We have to study it, but we can know anything men have made. A wonderful idea, but a dangerous one, too. What happens if we decide that, because we have studied hard, we *really know* the social world, when we know it, actually, only in some half-baked or incomplete way? Does this apply to Karl Marx? And after him to Lenin? And after him to Stalin? And is this terrible sequence now, perhaps, stopping because Solzhenitsyn says it has gone far enough, and points for relieving contrast to the pastoral simplicities of pre-Peter the Great times in Russia, celebrating the peasants who knew without knowing it what so many of the ecologists are now saying with such fervor and persuasiveness? Is it stopping because Dwight Macdonald, in *The*

Root Is Man, announced as a humanist verity that we need a new political vocabulary because the Left has become the Right, and is worse in many respects than the old Right which the Revolution so righteously destroyed?

We shall have to see about such things. Meanwhile, Russia today seems governed by tired Bolshevik slogans adapted to the functional commonplaces of bourgeois human nature. That, at any rate, is Mao's view of the matter. He, however, wanted the Revolutionary love that normally flourishes only for glorious moments on the barricades to go on forever. So, with a watchful eye for "excesses," he kept his hand on the spigot of a vast barrel of adolescent frenzy, turning it on or off at selected intervals, hoping to keep the Revolution going at concert pitch. Is there, one wonders, any sort of management that can make human nature act continually at concert pitch?

Should we hold Vico responsible for such experiments? Hardly. Almost any kind of statement about the nature of man and the nature of things might bring about such consequences. Or are there statements that cannot lead to purges, righteous assassinations, thought control, secret police, etc? The question is important, but we must also inquire, if such statements can be made, why they don't go far enough to suit the impatient moralists who prefer changing history to understanding it. Time enough, they say, for understanding history after we establish Justice. Truth and such abstractions can come later. . . . It is sad, it is *very* sad, that not enough of these people learn their lesson from the ordeal of experience, after they have finished with what they claimed had to be done. Not enough of them learn what it means to stand in slack-jawed wonder, like the posse in the *Oxbow Incident*, listening to incontrovertible evidence that they executed innocent men. No one is really innocent, they casually explain.

Yes, although we have all this knowledge, and although artists have renewed it in plays and novels, we keep on acting out the worst sort of plots, as if Dostoevsky's Legend of the Grand Inquisitor had never been written. Somebody has to take charge, a confident soul announces: look at all these crimes against the people! But the crimes continue after the Revolution. It makes you long for the Passive East! Then someone else, perhaps not confident at all, but only reflective, remarks that in large regions of the Orient people are starving to death in droves, and that in some sections, for a long time, two out of five children were infected by trachoma before they got to be six years old. Who can live complacently with the idea that there may be evils without remedies?

Vico was a genius who got practically no attention from his contemporaries. He wanted terribly to be recognized; he sensed his own worth; but he had the misfortune to be endowed with too much insight to go along with the Cartesian dogmas. He followed Descartes for a time, it was hard not to, but when he saw that Descartes was determined to ignore the subjective resources for gaining knowledge, that he was contemptuous of historical studies and would accept as significant only what could be quantified, Vico revolted. Here we shall quote a long passage from Isaiah Berlin's *Vico and Herder* (Viking, 1976, $12.50) as the most useful way to take note of a splendid and informing book. (Most of what we have been saying, or trying to say, has been a result of reading it.) On the importance of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), Berlin sums up:

> The light cast since Vico's day by comparative mythology, philology, anthropology, archaeology, art history, by all the interrelated studies of human antiquities pursued under the influence of contending theories and systems—of Hegel, Marx, Comte, Durkheim, Weber, Freud; the very idea of using empirical methods to find order and meaning beneath the vast variety of social experience in its historical movement; the notion that there stretches a gulf, or at least a great distance, between us and the early centuries of man, so that a powerful, but not impossible, leap of the imagination must be made by

> anyone who seeks to explain to himself that remote world; these transforming conceptions ferment in what Michelet admiringly called "the little pandemonium of the New Science." Vico is author of the idea that languages, myths, antiquities, directly reflect the various fashions in which social or economic or spiritual problems or realities were refracted in the minds of our ancestors, so that what may appear as profound theological conflicts or impassable social taboos are not what mechanically-minded thinkers have taken them to be—by-products of material processes, biological, psychological, economic, and so on, although they may be that too—but primarily, "distorted" or primitive ways of recognizing social facts and of reacting to them. . . .
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> He was the first to conceive the notion that in this fashion it was possible to achieve a kind of window into the past—an "inside" view—to reconstruct, not simply a formal procession of the famous men of the past, clad in their stock attributes, doing great deeds or suffering some fearful fate but the style of entire societies which struggled and thought worshipped, rationalized, and deluded themselves, put their faith in magical devices and occult powers, and felt, believed, created in a fashion which may be strange to us, and yet not wholly unintelligible. All these astonishingly bold hypotheses Vico conceived and applied in a world which was then, and for many years, acutely hostile to the "psychologizing," anti-Cartesian, anti-"physicalist," approach. It is scarcely credible that Vico could have achieved all this in the intellectual solitude and squalor of the conventional, timid and narrow society which he accepted completely and in which he lived out his long, oppressed, unhonoured life.

An awesome man, Vico. First, there is the wonder of his work and its enormous fertility, which was recognized by only a very few until almost the present. Second, there is the pathos of his life, so filled with disappointments, and the lesson or instruction in that, if any. Geniuses who defy the rising tide of a dogma well on the way to being established as the ruling principle of an age can hardly gain recognition. The critics of Descartes in England, more or less contemporaries of Vico, suffered a similar fate. Only since W. Macneile Dixon's *The Human Situation* (1937) have many modern readers been able to appreciate the worth of the Cambridge Platonists and to admire their opposition to the mechanizing philosophy that would in time betray the Western world into excesses which, in their dark fruition, we seem virtually unable to control.

All the more reason, then, to enlarge our appreciation of Vico, and to think with admiration and with sympathy of his loneliness. Mr. Berlin continues:

> The principles of the new method can now be re-stated more fully. The search for truth is for the most part a genetic and self-analyzing enquiry. Whenever man is more than a mere spectator, wherever he takes part as an actor, that is, outside the province of the natural sciences, of the objective laws of which he is an observer, and of mathematics, which he invents, and which cannot therefore, by itself yield information about the real world, he is examining the activity of his own spirit in its interaction with the external world. This activity shapes and leaves unmistakable evidence of itself in human institutions—the chief amongst which are languages, customs, religious rites, legends, myths, moral and legal systems, literature, the arts—everything that together constitutes a culture or way of life. Examination at first hand of surviving monuments is a direct door into the human past, and casts a steadier light both on what men were and did, and on their reasons and motives for doing it, than the stories of later chroniclers and historians, many of whom lacked knowledge and, above all, historical imagination, and were often guilty of anachronisms, crude and shallow psychology, undisciplined fancy, and innocent or corrupt personal bias. Men must write history afresh in the light of the new critical principles, using as material the long familiar data, but subjecting them to questions of a novel kind: what kind of men can have talked, written, worshipped, governed themselves, created, as these men did? What must the natures and lives of such men have been, and what kind of social experiences must have shaped them, to have generated the successive stages through which they developed? Can a fixed order or pattern of such stages be shown to follow by causal or metaphysical necessity from the changing nature of these men, or, it may be, of all men and societies as such? If there are such patterns, are they linear and non-repetitive or cyclic and recurrent? All "popular" traditions must have "grounds of truth," that is, some direct vision of the world, of which they are incarnations, preserved by entire peoples for long periods of time: the function of Vico's new science

> was to recover these grounds. This was the programme, and the New Science, especially in the second, recast version of 1730, was Vico's attempt to realize it.
>
> It was clear to him that, whatever the correct solution of the problem of development, the fashionable theories of his time were false.

Vico, it becomes clear, mastered the art of how to become an honorable failure. You try very hard to learn the truth, no matter what other people, however popular, assert or maintain. Yet if you read him, or read him through the discerning eyes of Isaiah Berlin, you are little embarrassed by some of the certainties *he* reaches. So you go back to simple respect for his method and his declaration of intent, while wishing that Wittgenstein's rule—"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent"—had wider or even universal application.

Well, if it did, would anyone dare to say *anything?* In every great reform of thought—which is also every great innovation in thought—the founders always maintain that they are going back to square A, and to think as no one has ever thought before. Supposing one can do this is probably a big delusion, yet it usually sounds like a good idea. And if it didn't seem like a good idea, what then would happen to "progress"? History would stop, wouldn't it?

So the question becomes: In what frame of mind does it become possible to make some *real* progress?

Could the answer be: The frame of mind which starts out by declaring that all progress is relative, and that absolute progress is an absolute chimera. Which means that every step of every kind of progress will always, at some time or other, have to be translated into some *other* scheme of meaning, some freshly conceived transcendent scale of values which was not previously understood, or even imagined to exist.

Would this be a rule that could be applied to everything that all human beings do, now and forever?

It seems possible to say yes. But if we do say yes, then we must ask if this half-skeptical, half-gnostic way of thinking about human development is stimulating enough to stir people to keep busy with the work of the world. Maybe not. So many people like to be *sure.* They want to tell other people how sure they are, and then, being no more than innocents in the pursuit of truth, they decide that the time has come to *prove* what they have become sure of to everybody else.

And then we have a religious war, or an invasion of Cambodia, or a Holy Office staffed by properly trained Holy Officers. The list of dreadful things likely to happen when people feel the compulsion to prove something is too long to be published, and could not be complete.

The alternative? There seems only one: To add to the population of those who decide to live lovingly with one another without asking or imposing proof of much of anything. Little increments of workable certainty seem to accumulate for people who make this decision. They acquire knowledge that cannot possibly hurt anyone at all.

REVIEW
HISTORICAL SIGNS AND STAGES

WE have read all of Jacob Needleman's critical introduction to Ludwig Binswanger's "Existential Psychoanalysis" and enough of Binswanger's selected papers in *Ludwig Binswanger* (Souvenir Press and Basic Books, 1963), edited by Mr. Needleman, to attempt to extract from this volume what may be of value to the general reader. While the language is formidable—the book was written in the vocabulary of Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre—some of its ideas have a luminous quality, and the underlying purpose is to restore man to the position of being (potentially, if not actually) master of his own life.

For Binswanger, the work is both an appreciation and a criticism of Freud. For Mr. Needleman it is an opportunity to trace from certain Kantian assumptions and patterns of thought the evolution over the past two hundred years of man's attempt to know or understand himself. One could say that the tensions of the book are created by this unending struggle, which is a defining characteristic of the human situation. We embody the will to know ourselves and the world, yet every age devises restrictive rules to avoid the self-deception to which humans are prone. Sometimes the rules are so narrow that they seem to shut out crucial elements of knowledge. But we must have rules. How, then, in our time, can we study the human side of human beings without a radical redefinition of scientific method? And if we decide to redefine science, we are confronted by the anxious question: After its redefinition will science, in this case psychology, still be science?

Our report will probably suffer from deliberate avoidance of the rigorous Existentialist vocabulary. Nothing less than going to the book itself—and probably other books—will serve if that vocabulary is to be admitted. But using it here would make our notes hopelessly obscure.

In a way, the heart of the book has already been noticed through some quotations from Binswanger in the article, "The Composition of Opposites," MANAS, June 16. Binswanger is a champion of the human spirit, and he was much surprised to find Freud willing to admit the reality of the spirit in man, since the dynamics of Freudian psychoanalysis allow neither space nor function to the human "spirit."

In what sense did Binswanger hope to restore the spirit to the nature of man? As a psychiatrist, he saw that a stage of this restoration had become possible through the existential philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger. The problem was to avoid feeding into psychological or psychoanalytical theory prejudicial assumptions which belonged only to the mind-set of the age—which were not *given* in man's actual experience of himself. Such assumptions—in effect, "self-denying" assumptions, which are common enough—involve in our time the supposition that human nature and human identity can somehow be gotten at through reductive, mechanistic analysis. Another supposition is that the mind is "nothing but" the function of the brain, with mental disorders the consequence solely of brain pathology. Binswanger wanted to purify psychoanalysis of such assumptions. It seemed evident to him that they were unexamined expressions of metaphysical prejudice which would hamper and perhaps sterilize growth in the practice of psychiatry, to say nothing of their effect on larger philosophical questions of the nature of man.

How can an understanding of man avoid prejudicial assumptions? The existentialist answer was to make no assumptions at all—simply take what is given in consciousness without the coloring of any presupposition. Mr. Needleman says:

> One of the things that phenomenology claims differentiates it from philosophical systems is its attempt to be presuppositionless. Systems there are that claim undoubtable presuppositions, but none that claim to have no presuppositions at all. We shall see

that phenomenology's certainty, as well as its powerlessness, stems from this refusal to presuppose.

Well, if it is powerless, what good is it? One might say, however, that the integrity of this resolve to make no assumptions—simply to consider what is—suffuses all that one does with a moral intensity that generates both strength and impartiality. This result might be present even if it should be the case that presuppositionless thinking is in fact impossible. If purpose (intentionality) is intrinsic in human life and thought, then even the determination to remain without presuppositions is purposeful, and *that* becomes a presupposition of a sort. Whether this is so or not, or whether it is recognized or not, the love of impartiality inevitably finds expression, and this leads to subtle forms of understanding and perhaps even seminal discovery. What in one sense is powerless may be in some other, hardly definable sense, quite powerful indeed.

Needleman takes from Husserl an account of the method: "The decisive factor lies before all in the absolutely faithful description of that which really lies before one in phenomenological purity, and in keeping at a distance all interpretations that transcend the given." But one might have a question in relation to "that which really lies before one in phenomenological purity." What or who is the "one" before whom it lies? If a savage sees a watch cog lying on the forest floor, it is a bright, symmetrical object. But if a European sees it, he sees a part of a watch—a technological extension of himself. "I," said Ortega, "am myself and my circumstances." To what extent may the degree of conscious incorporation of one's circumstances into oneself—the conscious self, after all, is both self and self-knowledge (perhaps the difference between these two is only verbal, and the self *is* its self-knowledge)—vary with human beings, epochs, and radii of awareness? And couldn't this result in very different ways of identifying "presuppositions"? What, after all, is "bare subjectivity" but a necessary abstraction, a polar limit of the *idea* of self? That such pure subjectivity may be "experienced" is surely questionable. Shall we, then, think of the self as resolvable to some such dimensionless subjective "point," or shall we say that it is not really the self unless it includes the totality of one's being? (Ultimately, All-Being?) No doubt the phenomenologists have considered such questions, but have they settled them? Could anyone?

It would of course violate the protective discipline of the phenomenologists to suggest that if the "one" before whom lies the phenomenological purity of experience is a Buddha, what is "given" will indeed be different from what lies before an ordinary man. Yet the question ought to be raised. Raising it views phenomenology as a historical phenomenon, although perhaps a historical necessity and therefore beneficent when developed by men of intellectual intensity and moral integrity. We could think of it as one form of the systematic outgrowing of certain limitations of a previous period of thought. Culturally, this has to happen, we could say. Culturally, it must take time, since assimilation to consensus is the mode of collective action by which fresh plateaus of common human understanding are reached. The rate of such developments is binding, determining the limit of public truth, but meanwhile there will be individuals who will leap far ahead, staking out new possibilities, far beyond the presently acceptable, or what is becoming acceptable: that is, they may succeed in this or they may simply get lost in amorphous clouds of speculation. The relations of new ideas to existing levels of thought always have importance, even though they remain optional. Whether "self" and "truth" can reach very far beyond intersubjectivity—be conceived in non-social terms—is indeed a question.

In a paper called "Freud and the Magna Carta of Clinical Psychiatrv," Binswanger concludes with a summary that will help to show how he thinks and what he cares about. The "Magna Carta" spoken of is a formulation by Wilhelm Griesinger, thoughtful and far-seeking in its way,

yet limiting the goal of psychiatry to the scope of greater biological insight and knowledge of brain structures. Binswanger says in summary:

> The psychic object becomes with Meynart an anatomical, with Wernicke a neuropathological, and with Freud a biological theory. But as we have seen, the spirit of the psychiatric charter tolerates the predominance of no *theory* and thus also refuses to have psychiatry founded upon Freudian theory. On Freud's side, however, we have found nothing in his theory that runs counter to this charter. Though his doctrine may be preponderantly materialistic—corresponding in this respect with the intentions of the founders of the psychiatric charter—the direction he sets for psychiatric research is nevertheless the only one that does *not* "leave untouched the actual content of the human psychic life in its whole richness." That this richness of "actual psychic content"—as Dilthey puts it—is projected upon and reduced to a psychobiological apparatus ought to be its least disturbing aspect to the dogmatic proponent of the psychiatric clinical charter. For he, too, leads us merely to an enormous *simplification* of the life of the psyche and to a *reduction* of it to a crude natural scientific schema governed by a few principles. Freud, however, seeks out that rich psychic content in its deepest detail and source, insofar as he pursues the difficult route of transposing and translating psychic content into various biologically functional "systems" and "modes of speech" and then constructs thereof a uniquely encompassing and complex conceptual system. . . . Now man is no longer merely an animated organism, but a "living being" who has origins in the finite life process of this earth, and who dies its life and lives its death. . . .

Then, after he has shown how much Freud added to the picture of the human being, in health and disease, in struggle and defeat, Binswanger speaks for himself, offering a crucial amendment to the "charter":

> But, we must add, here "man" is not yet man. For to be a *man* means not only to be a creature begotten by living-dying life, cast into it and beaten about, and put into high spirits or low spirits by it: it means to be a being that looks its own and mankind's fate in the face, a being that is "steadfast," i.e., one that likes its own stand, or stands on its own feet. Thus, too, sickness, labor, suffering, pain, guilt, and error are not yet, with Freud as we consider him here, (historical) signs and stages; for signs and stages are not merely fleeting scenes of a passing drama, but "eternal" moments of a historically determined being, of being-in-the-world as *fate*. That we are *lived* by the forces of life is only one side of the truth; the other is that *we* determine these forces as our fate. Only the two sides together can take in the full problem of sanity and insanity. Those who like Freud, have forged their fate with the hammer—the work of art he has created in the medium of language is sufficient evidence of this—can dispute this fact least of all.

Binswanger did what he could—unsuccessfully—to persuade Freud of these things. Now that he is in wider print and getting more attention, his time for successful persuasion may have come.

COMMENTARY
APPARENT CONTRADICTION

THERE is an interesting contrast—perhaps a contradiction—between the program of public education advocated for Paonia, Colorado (see "Children"), by Carlton Meek, and the basic contentions of Robert M. Hutchins. With a persuasive show of reason, Mr. Hutchins has long maintained that vocational instruction ought not to be confused with general education, the goal of which is a capacity to deal with the moral issues of life. His central point was well made by Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, a great teacher of the arts, who wrote in *Vision in Motion:*

> With growing industrial opportunities the entire educational system attained a vocational aspect. Schools lost sight of their best potential quality: universality. They lost their sense of synthesis to the extent of a complete separation of the various types of experience. . . .
>
> A wholesale literacy seemed at first to open new and happy vistas for everyone. But, paradoxically, mass distribution of schooling accomplished a negative miracle. The speedy dispensation of education for *immediate use* . . . provided the masses with a quick training but threw overboard its purpose, namely, that "not knowledge but the power to *acquire* knowledge is the goal of education." (Pestalozzi.)

Dr. Hutchins, in short, was not attacking the sort of vocational training that, say, Gandhi proposed when he counseled teaching the young better ways of meeting the economic needs of their region—a kind of education with many socializing by-products in human understanding. His target was rather the *ideology* of "always more," and the claim that efficient techniques are the answer to all human problems.

We wondered a bit, in reading Mr. Meek's recommendations, about the log cabin school rooms that Phoenix has found so useful. Log construction sounds fine, but having the rooms "windowless" needs more explanation or justification. The pioneers managed to have a few openings in their dwellings, and some similar application of "intermediate technology" seems in order for places where children gather for study and work.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
AVENUES OF COMMON SENSE

THE *North Fork Times*, a county weekly newspaper published in Paonia, Colorado, supports the school bonds proposed to finance construction of larger schools for this growing agricultural and mining region. But like some other editors around the country, Ed Marston, the editor of the *Times*, is determined to have an open mind and to admit to his columns even unpopular or unfamiliar brands of common sense. After an encounter with a beef rancher in the area, he decided that the ideas of the rancher on schooling in Delta County were worth repeating. The rancher, it seems, was provoked to speak his mind by certain hard facts. Referring to his cattle business, Carlton Meek said: "We lose at least $50 every time a calf hits the ground and starts sucking." And then he said: "What good are the new schools a large bond issue would build if it forces families to move out—if it's the straw that breaks the camel's back?"

The *North Fork Times* is edited humanly, not ideologically. So the rancher—who belongs to a family which has run cattle in that part of Colorado for sixty years, and who has served a six-year term on the school board—has his say:

> It is a view which is strongly, but not belligerently held. Meek welcomes discussions as the only way to work out a solution. In fact, he got in touch with the *North Fork Times* because he knows we favor a bond issue.
>
> Meek recognizes the need for a rebuilding program, but says it should be long-term and gradual.
>
> "Start a building program with the small schools. Up to now, we've always concentrated on the big schools. How do we know Delta and Paonia [communities affected] won't vote, let's say, a $2 million bond issue for Cedaredge and Hotchkiss [other communities] if they know they'll get their turn next?
>
> The rancher would be careful with the $2 million. "You can do a good job of educating kids without carpets on the floors, if the buildings are clean and rebuilt."
>
> Meek suggests saving on costs by running the schools the year round. He would also like to see the District "build a collection of one-room classrooms all around the main buildings."
>
> Those classrooms—a throw-back to the area's vanished one-room school houses—would be built of logs and have no windows.
>
> Logs, he says, are a cheap, sturdy construction material that will outlast concrete if kept dry. And windows, Meek continues, are expensive to install and increase heating costs.
>
> The rancher says he got his ideas for a covey of log rooms surrounding a main building from a Phoenix area school district, which successfully used the concept.
>
> But Meek is concerned with more than the school system's physical plant. He opposes, for example, an increase in the number of subjects:: "We should teach the subjects we have better."
>
> And he would replace basketball courts, football fields wrestling rooms and baseball diamonds with a swimming pool at each school.
>
> "We spend a terrific amount now on sports, yet we've only produced one professional athlete to my knowledge. We've turned out highly skilled people—attorneys, state representatives, doctors, veterinarians—but practically no athletes.

This objection to the emphasis on sports recalls the last school bond issue we had opportunity to vote on (in a California town). Like other "progressive" spirits who have children, we voted for the bonds. The opponents seemed to be mostly offspringless people in the real estate business and angrily set against any tax increase. *But*, after investigating we found that a very large proportion of the money borrowed would go to build an enormous concrete football field stadium for the local *high school!* The figures are forgotten, but at the time they seemed appalling. Well, with confused reluctance we voted for the bonds. The occasion was hard to forget since, afterward, every Friday night during football season, sometimes until nearly eleven o'clock, the stentorian loudspeaker announcement of scores vibrated through the walls of every home within a radius of half a mile of the stadium. Early risers could hardly go to sleep early, and sick people who needed quiet were just out of luck. These are days,

one reflects, when no matter how you vote, things remain out of joint. You have to vote (or do you?), but there ought to be more effective things to do.

Rancher Meek continues his argument about athletics:

> In his view, swimming is the best exercise there is, and unlike football and basketball, it's an activity that can be continued well past middle age. Finally, Meek says, you can't break a leg or a back swimming, but it may allow you to save your own or someone else's life some day.

Next come ideas that in some ways hark back to Thomas Jefferson on education:

> While Meek disapproves of the District's sports policy he is enthusiastic about vocational education in general and the new voc-ed school in particular. In an agricultural area he says, it is especially necessary to teach young people skills such as welding and equipment repair.
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> By comparison, he says that an academic education is important to the youngsters receiving it, but less important to the area. "We have very little white collar work in this area. We may educate the youngsters, but most of them will have to go elsewhere to use their skills."
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> The rancher also thinks that the schools may not serve the really brilliant youngster very well. "There's nothing here for them—we're agriculture." [Couldn't they use a couple of Barry Commoners?]
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> His suggestion is that the area set up a fund to be used to send exceptionally bright youngsters to college whenever they qualify—even if it's in their high school freshman or sophomore year.

He would also limit the salaries of administrators, abolish tenure for teachers, and limit school board members to two terms. School boards, he says, are blamed for a lot of things that aren't their fault.

He goes on to explain in detail why agriculture is having a very hard time these days—because the entire economy, not local conditions, controls prices in agriculture—and what he says sounds sensible and interesting (see *North Fork Times*, June 16, Box A Paonia, Colo., 81428), even if it might discourage a thirteen-year-old from wanting to be a cowboy.

Here, however, we want to think a bit about "welding and equipment repair" in relation to education. Anyone who has had to buy machinery for a small business, without knowing enough about it at first hand, learns quite a lot from the salesmen of the equipment companies. They seem to be of two sorts. First, there are the bright young men who have been trained to sell competitively. They are glib, confident, and have learned a lot of answers. Then there are, now and then, workers from the maintenance or repair benches who have proved bright, intelligent, ambitious, and able to sell. There is a distinct difference between these two sorts of salesmen. The former mechanics have learned what they know by working with metal. They are, you could say, practical engineers with some "science" as the basis of what they can do. No excuses. Either you can fix it, make it work, or you can't. A certain kind of reality-testing is the foundation of these men's working lives. If you ask them a question about their product, they tend by habit or instinct to tell the truth. If the truth is not favorable to a sale, they're likely to seem tongue-tied, or even blush a little. It goes against the grain of such men to misrepresent what they know about metals and machines—what has been their daily encounter with "reality." They'll either tell the truth or give you little involuntary warnings. In business, you can practically trust people like that. Finding someone you can trust is a lot better than being wished "a nice day." It actually *makes* a nice day.

But not the fast-talking salesmen. They have not been blessed with the characterological discipline of work at the bench. They lack intimate experience of the symmetries of a certain aspect of nature, as Plato might say, which is a natural foundation for morality.

FRONTIERS

Gardens, Trees, and Other Good Things

THE May-June *Resurgence* ($10 a year, Eastbourne House, Bullards Place, London E2, England) is a very rich issue. We'll make some extracts that seem related, the first from Geoffrey Ashe's column on the roots of the social-economic-religious transformation affecting England and virtually all other countries. He asks: "Is anything positive likely to emerge from this ferment?" Will there be "the dawn of a new religion in the west, perhaps in Britain?" After musing on the mess Christian missionaries made in their attempt to convert the non-European world, he offers this speculation:

> If a new religion takes shape in (for example) Britain, it will not have been initiated by missionaries from other cultures, nor will it use their terms. To say this is not to insist that it must be completely home-grown. It could well be partly a creation of people from outside, fertilizing and catalyzing. Its roots, however, will be in the mythology, the traditions, the spiritual geography and holy places of Britain itself. . . . In Britain, up to now, the pattern has tended to occur as myth rather than ideology. It is the return of King Arthur, or, in Blake's symbolism, the awakening of Albion from the sleep into which he fell aeons ago. I am not sure whether a specific meaning could be given to such images. I am quite sure they reveal the same tendency.

This seems a useful way of thinking. Mr. Ashe concludes:

> We don't really believe in progress; not, at least, in straightforward up-and-up progress. We are haunted by a sense of loss, of a far-off rightness buried under corruption, but recoverable. It has taken many forms, most of them, in sober terms, dubious—daydreams of golden ages and ideal communities in a never-never past. Yet I think there are profound psychological reasons for it, though there is no space to discuss them here. We ignore the archetype at our peril. If a new religion arises, a major part of it will be a diagnosis of what we have lost and what we need to regain, and a re-winding of the psyche for a fresh start in keeping with that.

A contrapuntal line comes from Hilary Peters who, with Ken Bushell, "has a farm—not nestling in the Welsh hills but in the Surrey Docks, London, within two miles of Tower Bridge!" There they raise and subsist upon the production of "9 goats (4 litres of goat milk a day), about 50 hens (40 eggs a day), 30 ducks (15 eggs a day) as well as two geese and a hive of bees." They live on a barge in the River (Thames) and sell produce to people living nearby—"goat cheese sandwiches, salads, yoghourt with honey." One wishes there were pictures! The plants in their garden are said to "come out of the rocks." Rocks on the Docks?

Hilary Peters explains how it all began:

> After the war, I must have been five or six, I noticed the city was just laid flat and out of the ruins grew these marvelous weeds—out of basements and out of buildings and out of masonry—absolutely everywhere. It really was inspiring! That's what our gardens are trying to create and that's what gave me the idea of a "London garden." . . . A lot of the people who do live here have had their jobs taken away with the docks going and they haven't got anything else to do. They are really ripe for something like this. I hope that the river will be a sort of centre of people's lives again one day. . . . Even people who have a lot of money and lead orthodox lives . . . they're always talking about how they wished they lived as I did. I realise things are changing all the time. I hope it won't be too violent. I don't see why it should be because it just seems that so many more people agree with us than used to. Perhaps it'll be a nonviolent revolution.

Next, a passage by Ivor Browne:

> This is the real struggle which has been going on in the world during our time—not the apparent battles between right and left, between socialism and capitalism, between church and State, but the relentless transfer of power and control from the peripheral to the central, from the small to the large, from the personal to the anonymous and institutional. Small private businesses amalgamate to form corporations, corporations merge to form multi-nationals, government departments expand to take over control of more and more areas of our personal lives, even national governments are superseded by supra-national federations.

And one from Simon O'Donohoe about the possible roots of an alternative society in Ireland:

Celtic civilization evolved from the same Indo-European origins as other European, Iranian and north Indian peoples. It challenges our conception of the nuclear family, of the position of women in society, of our relation to nature, of the ownership of property, of centralization of power, and many others. Present deeply ingrained fears and prejudices m Irish society could be better understood if we established the sources from which they derive. To understand, for instance, the hostility of many republican activists to common law—we might recall that the legal system in Ireland until as recently as the seventeenth century was the ancient Irish system of Brehon Law. Common law was an alien imposition. One of the operating principles of Brehon Law was the *making good* of any injury caused, as opposed to the common law principle of *punishment* for injury caused. In Brehon Law responsibility was seen as communal, not individual, as in common law. Common law administered the death penalty for many crimes in the Middle Ages; there was no capital punishment in Irish law.

This is not to argue that Celtic Ireland was a utopia, but there was much that an Alternative Society in Ireland might identify with. Private property did not exist.

The following is an extract from E. F. Schumacher's foreword to *Forest Farming* (a new book elsewhere reviewed in this issue of *Resurgence*)*:*

Traveling through India, I came to the conclusion that there was no salvation for India except through trees. I advised my Indian friends as follows: . . . "One of the greatest teachers of India was the Buddha who included in his teaching the obligation of every good Buddhist that he should plant and see the establishment of one tree at least every five years. As long as this was observed, the whole large area of India was covered with trees, free of dust with plenty of water, plenty of shade, plenty of food and materials. Just imagine you could establish an ideology which made it obligatory for every able-bodied person in India, man, woman, and child, to do that little thing—to plant and see to the establishment of *one tree a year*, five years running. This, in a five-year period, would give you 2,000 million established trees. Anyone can work it out on the back of an envelope that the economic value of such an enterprise, intelligently conducted, would be greater than anything that has ever been promised in any of India's five year plans. It could be done without a penny of foreign aid; there is no problem of savings and investment. It would produce foodstuffs, fibres, building material, shade, water, almost anything man really needs."