VOLUME XXVII, NO. 15
APRIL 10, 1974

OLD RATIONALISM FOR NEW

A FUNDAMENTAL change in the assumptions and modes of serious thinking is now under way, and while it has not yet gathered enough strength to have noticeable impact on people's behavior, its progress is becoming evident and its appeal, which speaks to our deepest longings, is rich in promise. The easiest identification of this thinking is in terms of a radical criticism of past thinking, but its positive basis is of greater importance, although difficult to state. We begin, then, with a brief review of the criticism.

The central drive is to expose the inadequacy, errors, and devastating consequences of modern rationalism. In MANAS for Jan. 9, we took a look at rationalism as generally conceived, making this definition: "It means, usually, a mechanistic approach to all processes of nature and life, a rejection of subjective experience as the source of significant material for investigation, and a reasoned account of things and events based upon those facts and laws which are currently accepted by the various branches of science." For representative examples of the new spirit, we have quotations from three contemporary thinkers on the defects of this sort of rationalism. The first is from Richard Goodwin's *The American Condition,* as condensed in his *New Yorker* series (this passage is in the Jan. 21 issue):

> Truth itself—validity—came to be defined as the product of scientific reason. . . . by the nineteenth century many believed that the whole of existence could be compacted within the framework of scientific reason. The claims of scientific reason transcended history, asserting truths and a way toward truth which would be forever valid—a prerogative theretofore reserved for the Bible and its theological elaborators. Galileo's message was for all men. Every man, whatever his station or his scars, contains a spark of logic, an unextinguished ember of analysis. Scientific reason was necessary to the emerging age of individualism and mass desire. It expressed and justified the one and helped satisfy the other. Its simplest litanies evoked the common response and belief requisite for a successful creed. It provided the feelings of domination and control necessary to individuals severing life-defining bonds. To calculate was to rule; to understand was to exploit; knowledge was power. To reason about the world was to incorporate it within the mind. . . . the pioneers of scientific reason sought not to diminish man but to glorify him. Their temper was exultant arrogance rather than humility.

This account of scientific rationalism attempts to be objective instead of accusatory. The force of the criticism is left to what seems self-evident. Mr. Goodwin's discussion is concerned with the ideal of human freedom, his purpose being to show how and why we are losing it, and what must be done if freedom is to be regained.

Our next quotation is from a paper by Walter Weisskopf on "Equality," which is inwardly related and inseparably joined with the ideal of freedom (his statement is quoted from the September 1973 *Annals* of the American Academy of Political and Social Science):

> The postindustrial, meritocratic, intellectual elite owes its high status to its mastery of a restrictive intellectuality of a cognitive, analytical, measuring and technical nature. They use instrumental rationality which can choose means, but can say nothing about ends, goals, purposes and ultimate meanings. This rationality has destroyed a deeper philosophical kind of reason which could deal with ends, goals, purposes and ulhmate meanings.

Here, again, self-evident impact is relied upon for the force of the criticism. What need for either emphasis or elaboration, since both are amply and painfully provided by the times?

We have our third quotation—from Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Ballantine, 1972)—at the hands of Stewart Brand, who wrote an appreciation of Bateson for *Harper's* of last November. Mr. Brand went to

Bateson looking for "clear conceptual bonding of cybernetic whole-systems thinking with religious whole-systems thinking," and garnered the following statements for consideration:

> Mere purposive rationality unaided by such phenomena as art, religion, dreams, and the like, is necessarily pathogenic and destructive of life; its virulence springs specifically from the circumstance that life depends upon interlocking *circuits* of contingency, while consciousness can only see such short arcs as human purpose may direct. . . . The social scene is nowadays characterized by the existence of a large number of self-maximizing entities which, in law, have something like the status of "persons"—trusts, companies, political parties, unions, commercial and financial agencies, nations, and the like. In biological fact, these entities are precisely *not* persons and are not even aggregates of whole persons. They are aggregates of *parts* of persons. . . . If Lake Erie is driven insane, its insanity is incorporated in the larger system of *your* thought and experience. . . . They say that power corrupts; but this, I suspect, is nonsense. What is true is that the *idea of power* corrupts.

From these three statements, it seems clear that the critical stance toward what is termed "scientific rationalism" is now well established. Actually, scores of excellent books and articles have built a strong foundation under this view, so that it is time to go on, as these critics do in part, to the difficult question of what can and ought to replace the mode of thinking that is subject to such serious questioning and attack. At issue, for a great many, is the secure feeling of *certainty* which the scientific method has promised, and already delivered at the material and technological level. How, it is asked, can we preserve our confident exactitude, our step-by-step advance toward a better world and a better life, without the rules and restrictions which identify scientific knowledge? All the ardor of the upward and onward spirit of the Enlightenment is at stake, since objectivity and the modern idea of progress are the very foundation of dialogue about human betterment. Who will know what anyone means without the familiar sanctions of our rationalism?

What then do these critics propose? They all three have something to say about how men should learn to think, and suggest some of the expected consequences. Goodwin, as a social analyst, advocates and practices a return to an older form of rationalism which takes into account elements of experience and moral realities scientific reason ignores:

> What we call scientific reason—the logical process of inferring conclusions from fact, observation, or assumption—is not the same as plain reason or rational thought or rational behavior, which means to come to terms with the world through the use of the intellect. "Reason" in the latter sense can include motive, justification, cause, and excuse. Although values cannot be prescribed by scientific reason, they can be a product of rational thought. It may be rational to be a pacifist, love your neighbor, exercise compassion, but that it is so can't be proved.

But since without the discipline of rational inquiry into what is good, right, and just, pursued despite the absence of nailed-down certainty, men gravitate in their decisions to the lowest common denominators of personal prejudice and unregulated impulse and desire, we must practice the wider rationality or perish. Goodwin's recommendations have a classical ring:

> Not only does the free individual establish his own purposes but they are consistent with the purposes of his fellows. He seeks to satisfy his own wants and to cultivate his own faculties in a manner that is consonant with the well-being of others.

The links between a man and his fellows are self-evident to reflective, moral rationality:

> Intimate association with others is itself an attribute of that humanity we wish to fulfill. . . . Individual liberty and social responsibility appear to be imperatives that are balanced, an increase in one resulting in the diminution of the other. . . . In Plato's Republic, the greatest good is the "bond of unity," in which "there is community of pleasures and pains"—in which "all the citizens are glad or grieved on the same occasions of joy and sorrow." . . . Not only does [the individual] inhabit society but the society inhabits him: he is not the individual within the commonwealth but social man. Within such a "bond of unity," the apparent contradiction in our description of freedom is dissolved.

Manifestly, crucial to dissolving such contradictions is the way we think about ourselves and the social aspect of our being:

> The isolation of the individual . . . stripped him of much of his power over social existence. (In fact, in the century since Marx the consciousness of social existence has been so nearly obliterated in the West that the ancient tradition of utopian construction has disappeared, and the word "utopia" has come to connote hopelessly fanciful and millennial imaginings rather than an inquiry into the worthiest goals of human striving. For example, if we perceive Plato's ideal state as an authoritarian monstrosity, it is not because our understanding has been enlarged but because our consciousness has been diminished.)

How do men begin to think in terms of their larger social being? What provocations will they respond to? Are pain and loss enough? This is the open problem, the undetermined course. For, as Goodwin says,

> awareness of loss is not awareness of self, and the expressed urges toward association remain, at most, isolated pockets of uncertain resistance to the progress of coercion and fragmentation. . . . the instabilities I have mentioned hint at the sources of inevitable change; they do not prescribe its direction.

How do you instruct children—the men and women to be—in a Platonic sociology? By what alchemical persuasions are larger social selves brought to life? What notions, concepts, dreams are the architects of better men? The formation of man is the problem of pedagogy: one hopes Mr. Goodwin will give it his attention.

Mr. Weisskopf's "program" is somewhat prepared for by ecological limitation and changing economic conditions:

> Mankind, especially in the West, will have to turn to a life style which consumes less resources and leads to less waste. . . . production and income, in the traditional sense, will lose their importance and a more equal distribution of income will be more acceptable merely because there will be fewer uses of money income. The basic values of life will have to be replaced by noneconomic values. People will have to pursue goals which will cost more time and energy, but less resources, and will not generate detrimental by-products. Friendship, love, enjoyment of nature, contemplation, mere loafing and so forth will have to become more important than income and purchasing power.

In illustration of what he envisions, Mr. Weisskopf quotes a dream of human community from some science fiction by Michael Young:

> Were we to evaluate people, not only according to their intelligence and their education, their occupation, and their power, but according to their kindliness and their courage, their imagination and their sensitivity, their sympathy and generosity, there could be no classes. Who would be able to say that the scientist was superior to the porter with admirable qualities as a father, the civil servant with unusual skill at gaining prizes superior to the lorry driver with unusual skill at growing roses? The classless society would also be the tolerant society, in which individual differences were actively encouraged as well as passively tolerated, in which full meaning was at last given to the dignity of man. Every human being would then have equal opportunity, not to rise up in the world in the light of any mathematical measure, but to develop his own special capacities for leading a rich life.

The study of fables is Mr. Weisskopf's laconic recommendation, since, having drawn on Michael Young's fable, he concludes: "But where, today, would a description of the ideal be found if not in a fable?"

Gregory Bateson's recommendations are a scattering of insights picked up on the run by Stewart Brand and loosely tied together in his *Harper's* article. They are nonetheless valuable for their sharp focus on ways of thinking. Usually, Bateson's positive statements are the second half of critical statements, or their implication. He is emphatically against the idea of setting out to "prove" something in a scientific manner. People make up their minds about how things ought to be and then try to be "rational" in their effort to *make* them that way. Interpreting Bateson, Brand says: "Rational purpose serving only its own convenience or plan—I want nature *my* way—asks for increasing trouble, the pathology of insistent control and guaranteed frustration."

Take laboratory science and experiments with animals. Bateson says he probably became an anthropologist "to avoid labs." Why?

> . . . you've got a whole spectrum of phenomena, the investigation of any of which throws light on any other—the investigation of none of which is very susceptible to the experimental method. . . . Because the experiment always puts a label on the context in which you are. You can't really experiment with people, not in the lab you can't. It's doubtful you can do it with dogs. You cannot induce a Pavlovian nervous breakdown—what do they call it, "experimental neurosis"—in an animal out in the field.

Laboratory experimenters frustrate the animals to see "what they will do," and eventually the animal can't cope and suffers a kind of collapse. Bateson says that it was really the experimenter who "broke down," failing to discriminate between a field for the exercise of animal intelligence and a field filled with useless and impossible obstacles which make any decision a complete gamble. So, as Brand says, "it's the experimenter's neurosis" which—and Bateson completes his sentence—"has now become the neurosis of the animal."

Out in the field, under natural conditions—

> None of this happens. For one thing, the stimuli don't count. Those electric shocks they use are about as powerful as what the animal would get if he pricked his leg on a bramble, pushing through.
>
> Suppose you've got an animal whose job in life is to turn over stones and eat the beetles under them. All right, one stone in ten is going to have a beetle under it. He cannot have a nervous breakdown because the other nine stones don't have beetles under them. But the lab makes him do that, you see.

Too much of science is "rational" interference with life and people—continuous and deliberate violations, in effect, of the natural order. There is also too much convictionless "looking around." People who have no strong beliefs can't find out anything important because they won't wrestle determinedly with paradox and contradiction. Bateson uses his students for an example:

> You have a rigid belief that there is no action at a distance, we will say, and you have a case of apparent telepathy to account for. Now you've got the data on one side and a stubborn epistemological assertion on the other, and you wrestle with those two somehow. My complaint with the kids I teach nowadays—graduate students and such—is that they don't really believe anything enough to get the tension between the data and the hypothesis. What they may find out doesn't really impact on theory, because they don't have any theory they're willing to hold tight enough to to get an impact. It *slides* all the time.

Brand asked him what people should do—"What's the way out?"

> The moment you want to ask the question, "What do you do about it?" that question itself chops the total ecology. I'm really talking Taoism, you know. The pathology is the breach of Taoism. And you say, "Well, now what's the cure for a breach of Taoism?" You want to say another breach of Taoism is the cure for it. . . .
>
> They say China came back to it every four or five hundred years. When the government really got into trouble they would call for the Taoists to come and get them out: "What do we do?" And the Taoists would say, "You follow the Way," and that's all they would ever say.
>
> Let's put it another way. Suppose that the Tao can be discovered only by the juxtaposition of two or more representations, descriptions, explanations, whatever you want to call them, and that one then said, "What two or more explanations could one present to . . . readers . . . such that they might get a ghost of a feeling that there was something about a Tao?"

You wrestle with paradox—a paradox, says Bateson, "is a contradiction in which you take sides—both sides"—and go on a long voyage of discovery with it, until "you come out knowing something you didn't know before, something about the nature of where you are in the universe." You have to stay with the paradox until the very end. "God defend you if you settle for one side to the exclusion of the other. Finally—

> The truth which is important is not a truth of preference it's a truth of complexity, of a total eco-interactive ongoing web in which we dance, the dance

> of Siva. You know, the whole of good and evil gets wrapped up in the dance of Siva. And in ancient Hebrew good-and-evil is a single word meaning "everything."

What sort of "knowledge" is Gregory Bateson after? Well, it's not the knowledge of combatants or conquerors or exploiters. While Stewart Brand's article is sophisticated and knowing, there may be simpler ways of saying these things. In fact, behind the general affirmations of Goodwin and Weisskopf, and the somewhat arcane telegrams from Bateson, there stand the majestic counsels of Krishna, Buddha, Lao tse, Jesus; and Plato. The language may be new, but not the wisdom. The non-attached man of the *Gita* is wanted for Mr. Weisskopf's utopia, while Platonic Guardians are needed by Mr. Goodwin, to undertake their austere pedagogy. And the unambitious yet alert and searching intelligence of Taoism pervades Mr. Bateson's little treatises on recognizing the vast complexity of life and coming to accept it in order to become an acceptable part of it.

The world once had great metaphysical systems embodying such instructions, and we seem to be slowly working our way back to those counsels, from crisis to crisis. Our way back has its skeptical Yankee restraint; we like to know, first, how things work. We don't want big theories unless we are sure they are absolutely required. So we keep trying out small conceptions, half-way philosophies, hoping they'll get us by.: But they don't work very well, and the compromises look more and more like compromises as time goes on. We'll have to go the whole way, no doubt, sooner or later, since from pain and embarrassment, from conscience and renewing vision, we'll learn that there are no shortcuts, no psychological tricks or technological fixes than can outwit the universe. Perhaps, as tough-minded doubters, we'll find a way to convert those ancient truths into an idiom so novel that we think we have discovered them ourselves, and then embrace them completely. The universe won't mind. But it will take a lot longer that way.

REVIEW
A POET AND THE HUMAN CONDITION

NOT long ago a reader, lamenting the lack of heroism in the present, recalled John Keats's "Lamia" and spoke of the young poet's conviction that it should be possible to face life bravely and to act imaginatively with only the "half-knowledge" characteristic of the human condition. Our reader wonders if Keats's attitude toward his own sense of being "unfinished" is productive and right not only for poets, but for us all. He writes: "In our present-day effort to know everything that is to be known by means of science and technological scrutiny, we leave little room for individual creativity." This seems wholly applicable to the common feeling that many of the important decisions in life must be left to the judgments of experts, since the totality of scientific knowledge far exceeds the grasp of any single individual.

Two related comments occur. One is Ortega's view that the facts and theories of science apply, for the most part, to a specializing branch of objective study, focusing, not on the issues and questions of human life, but on the internal problems of particularized research. A science, in short, has its own purposes and objectives, and these are seldom the same as the purposes and objectives of human life. A science may sometimes have a bearing, remote or intimate, on some crucial aspect of existence, but the application of scientific conclusions, under individual circumstances, may also remain obscure. The other comment takes note of the reduction in individual conviction which follows from relying on others. Without personal conviction, people are not driven to the intensive thinking that would enable them to recognize and struggle with contradictions. So life becomes for them a passionless enterprise. They lack the will to know, which may be understood as a natural effect of the "big inventory" theory of knowledge. The scientists are building up the total supply, while the rest of us wait around for them to put everything together. Our reader observes:

> I think this is evidenced by the paltry state of literature in 1974, as well as the bland parade of personalities that shuffle past us day after day. If you would grant me that something like the soul or spirit animates the personality, it seems that we are losing that sense of spirit. But I think the world can still be "the vale of soul-making," provided we are not too *prepared.*

Here the word "prepared" seems used in a negative or Taoist sense. Reflecting on the vicissitudes of Chinese civilization, Lao tse remarked that it was not until the country was ruled by "virtuous" men that corruption infected the empire—meaning that ostentations of virtue led to pretense and hypocrisy, making corruption inevitable. So, to be too "prepared" in the wrong way is to acquire habits issuing in self-defeat or mediocrity. Our reader offers a passage from Forster's *Howards End* as bearing similar counsels:

> Looking back on the past six months, Margaret realized the chaotic nature of our daily life, and its difference from the orderly sequence that has been fabricated by historians. Actual life is full of false clues and sign-posts that lead nowhere. With infinite effort we nerve ourselves for a crisis that never comes. The most successful career must show a waste of strength that might have removed mountains, and the most unsuccessful is not that of a man who is taken unprepared, but of him who has prepared and is never taken. On a tragedy of that kind our national morality is duly silent. It assumes that a preparation against danger is in itself a good, and that men, like nations, are the better for staggering through life fully armed. The tragedy of preparedness has scarcely been handled, save by the Greeks. Life is indeed dangerous, but the essence of it is not a battle.

What have we here, in fact? If we take this passage as a statement of how Forster looked at life—which seems reasonable we have a man with a strong sense that there is a right way to live, who is vaguely attempting to define it in principle. Implied is a definite outlook, a conception of ideal human behavior while in our incomplete or unfinished condition—a philosophy for the man

who does not, cannot, "know everything." In Forster's view, relative ignorance does not relieve him of responsibility; he still has a life to live, and it is *his* life, not something than any investigator of "objective nature" can program for him. The generality of principles on which a man may base his life is called a "metaphysic"; in this case it amounts to theory or deeply felt intuition about the nature of man. For Keats it involved thinking of human life as a project in "soul-making."

This seems a good place to recall Lionel Trilling's book of essays, *The Opposing Self* (a Viking paperback), to which we gave attention in these pages years ago. Trilling begins by observing that it is impossible "to think of Keats as only a poet," since he was "something even more interesting than a poet . . . a certain kind of man, a hero." Mr. Trilling develops this idea:

> Keats was situated in a small way of life, that of the respectable, liberal, intellectual middle part of the middle class; his field of action was limited to the small continuous duties of the family; his deportment was marked by quietness and modesty, at times by a sort of diffident neutrality. He nevertheless at every moment took life in the largest possible way and seems never to have been without the sense that to be, or to become, a man was an adventurous problem. The phrase in his letters that everyone knows, "life is a vale of soul-making," is his summing up of that sense, which, once we have become aware of its existence in him, we understand to have dominated his mind. He believed that life was given for him to find the right use of it, that it was a kind of continuous magical confrontation requiring to be met with the right answer. He believed that this answer was to be derived from intuition, courage, and the accumulation of experience. It was not, of course, to be a formula of any kind, not a piece of rationality, but rather a way of being and acting. And yet it could in part be derived from taking thought, and it could be put, if not into a formula, then at least into many formulations. Keats was nothing if not a man of ideas.

There is a sense in which Keats elevated ideas and meanings above even poetry. Forster, in the passage quoted earlier, has "Margaret" say that the essence of life is romance, "and its essence is romantic beauty." Keats might have objected, despite the famous line in "Ode to a Grecian Urn" declaring that "beauty is truth, truth beauty," which is "all/Ye know on earth and all ye need to know." Trilling shows that Keats goes beyond the aesthetic credo by quoting one of his letters:

> "Though a quarrel in the Streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine; the commonest Man shows a grace in his quarrel—By a superior being our reasonings may take the same tone—though erroneous they may be fine—This is the very thing in which consists poetry—"
>
> It is very brilliant, very fine, but it does not satisfy him "amusement," "entertainment" are not enough. Even poetry is not enough. Energy is the very thing "in which consists poetry"—"and if so it is not so fine a thing as philosophy—For the same reason that an eagle is not so fine a thing as a truth."

Nowadays, Trilling says, poets celebrate their mutilations. We take it for granted that the poet "writes out of a darkness of the spirit or not at all." But Keats and other poets of his time believed in and were concerned with health. Keats had no place for negation in his work. In a discussion of the idea of "soul-making," Trilling quotes again from the poet's letters:

> "I say 'Soul making'—Soul as distinguished from an Intelligence—There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in millions—but they are not Souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself. . . . "

Lacking sympathy with the conventional religious idea of salvation, Keats formulated his own view: potential souls, being sparks of the divine which come into the world to make their own souls, do their work and then return to God or the One.

"We have," Trilling says, "lost the *mystique* of the self." But he wrote this essay some twenty-five aears ago, and might agree that there are now urgent efforts to recover a sense of reality for the self. Keats, in his time, seemed to echo old Gnostic and Neoplatonic doctrines:

> "I began by seeing how man was formed by circumstances—and what are circumstances but touchstones of his heart—? and what are touchstones? but provings of his heart? and what are provings of

> his heart but fortifiers or alterers of his nature? and what is his altered nature but his Soul?—and what was his Soul before it came into the world and had these provings and alterations and perfectionings?—An intelligence—without Identity—and how is this Identity to be made through the medium of the heart? and how is the heart to become this Medium but in a world of Circumstances?"

Keat's answer was that we can live intelligently and ardently even though we are only partly developed, and he had a name for doing this: *"Negative Capability,* that ~s, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." At some length Trilling shows that this is not "anti-intellectualism" but rather an insistence on individual action even though there are areas where facts are unavailable or obscure. Trilling thinks that here Keats had the same spirit as Shakespeare, "who looks at human life, sees the terrible truth of its evil, but sees it so intensely that it becomes an element of the beauty which is created by his act of perception." This is tragedy—"ugly or painful truth seen as beauty." And Trilling finds this "no negative capability" but "the most *positive* capability imaginable," explaining Keats's use of the term by saying that he avoids doctrinal utterances "which, if he rests in them, will prevent his going on to his full poetic vision." Trilling adds: "We can see why Keats's admiration of Shakespeare was so much more than a literary admiration, why Shakespeare had for him something of the magnitude of a religious idea, figuring in his letters as a sort of patron sa~nt or guardian angel, almost as a Good Shepherd. Shakespeare suggested the only salvation that Keats found it possible to conceive, the soul accepting the fate that defines it."

COMMENTARY
PEDAGOGIC VERITY

IN his essay on John Keats (see Review) Lionel Trilling makes it plain that Keats's reconciliation with uncertainty and his preference for going through life "without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" did not imply any sort of anti-intellectualism. Keats had an energetic, hungry, and continually occupied mind, but he would not focus it on the anxious collection of information. He was intent on the drama of life, on the decisions he had to make and the meanings he sought, and this meant no pursuit of departmental knowledge, but rather a progressive nourishment of the organism of his being. Interestingly, an almost exact parallel of Keats's outlook and decision was given expression by John Holt five years ago in *The Underachieving School:*

> Well, the question then is, if piling up bodies of knowledge and expert data—if packing our heads full of ideas faster and faster—is not the answer, what is it, then, we have to do?
>
> In this connection I think of a letter a student of mine wrote me when she was in college. I had taught this girl in what we call the ninth grade, . . . and again in the eleventh grade. . . . When she was in her second year of college she wrote me a letter, talking of many things, and at one point she said: "What I envy about you, John, is that you have everything all taped," by which she meant that I had everything all figured out, in its place, organized, and so forth.
>
> Now I don't blame her for feeling this. This is precisely the picture that most educators try to give children of what it means to be educated; that you have everything all taped. You not only know everything, you know where it fits and how its parts relate to each other. This poor girl, in her confusion and ignorance and bafflement, wrote how much she envied me. I supposedly had everything figured out. I wrote her back and said, "You could not possibly be more mistaken. The difference between you and me is not that I have everything all taped, it's that I know I don't and I never will, I don't expect to and don't need to. I expect to live my entire live about as ignorant and uncertain and confused as I am now, and I have learned to live with this, not to worry about it. I have learned to swim in uncertainty the way a fish swims in water."
>
> It seems to me that it is only in this way that it is possible to live in the kind of a rapidly changing world that we live in. We are obliged to *act*, in the first place and in the second place to act intelligently, or as intelligently as possible, in a world in which, as I say, we know very little, in which, even if the experts know more than we do, we have no way of knowing which expert knows the most. In other words, we are obliged to live out our lives thinking, acting, judging on the basis of the most fragmentary and uncertain and temporary information.

This seems a statement of a fundamental truth of pedagogy—the art and science of the formation of human beings.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
SUCCESS STORY

A MONTH ago we spoke of the difference between the individual and the social approach to education, remarking that it is difficult to combine the two, since political action does not seem to come naturally to people who mainly want and are able to teach. Well, like all generalizations, this one has limits, since it does not apply to Hannah Hess, who last year published *The Third Side of the Desk* (Charles Scribner's Sons). The sub-title is "How Parents Can Change the Schools." Mrs. Hess starts right out:

> I have seen the New York public school system from three sides of the desk: first, as a student, where in addition to the fundamentals that school is supposed to teach (but which, in fact, does not always succeed in doing) I absorbed many attitudes that I carried with me, largely unmodified, when I approached school from the second side of the desk—as a teacher. It was not until I saw the school system as a parent—from the third side of the desk—that these attitudes changed.

Her point is that she was, at first, very largely an offprint of the system, under which effort and "a modicum of intelligence" are enough to achieve success. Her own experience led her to think that no one need fail in school:

> I was a shining example of the American success story. I started school as a non-English-speaking student. I received none of the bilingual assistance that is beginning, but barely, to be offered to children today. For me it was sink or swim in English, and presto, I swam. True, I had sympathetic teachers at the outset. True, I came from a home where nothing less than success was expected of me. True, I came from a tradition where Jews were many things, and most recently those things had certainly been viewed negatively, but Jews were not academic failures. Therefore, clean, polite, punctual, and hard-working, I succeeded. Not all my teachers were sympathetic. In any school one cannot entirely escape the bigots and the incompetents. Nevertheless, I learned and I succeeded; and if I could do this, then anyone could.

By this time you at least know the book is going to be interesting, and probably valuable. No dancing around, but big, sharp bites into the subject. Briefly, as the flap description says, Mrs. Hess tells from personal experience about how a few parents changed a school from being a bad experience for children into a good one:

> The prolonged teachers' strike of 1968 produced at least one positive result in that it revealed to the parents of PS 84 on Manhattan's Upper West Side the inadequacies and injustices in their children's education and impelled them to remedy those deficiencies and inequities. *The Third Side of the Desk* is the history of that parent movement, resulting ultimately in the institution of an open-classroom program at PS 84. . . .
>
> The overall implication is that if one small group of determined parents can conquer the New York City Board of Education, then parents everywhere can have a say in determining the educational direction of their schools.

We leave enjoyment of Mrs. Hess's blow-by-blow description of how the campaign for community control was carried to victory to those who will get the book and read it. Little by little, as a parent, she began to see how and why the school where her small daughter attended was unjust, and self-righteously so. Then she and other aroused parents, aided by a few teachers, went into action to get a new principal and, in effect, a new school. It took about three years.

Skipping to the last chapter, we find Mrs. Hess writing about how both she and the school had changed:

> On my first visit to PS 84, many light years ago, I had looked for signs as to the kind of school it was. I was a different person then, looking with the bias of a teacher who had come through the system. What I had looked for then was order, quiet, and children in their seats. Finding these as I passed I mistook them for education and decided we could entrust our kids to the school.

Now she looks for signs of *life*—"creative disorder," some people once called it:

> PS 84 today has few resemblances to the school I first saw. The windows are crammed full of children's art, all different. In some of the rooms the windows themselves are painted (to the everlasting horror of our custodian). A visitor to most schools

> will see tiled corridors gleaming and bare. At PS. 84 the walls are endless bulletin boards, filled with stories, poems, and pictures, on topics ranging from ecology and peace to monsters and rockets and trips to the zoo. The stories may be scrawled in magic marker with the letters climbing uphill and sideways, but they say clearly that children live here. . . .
>
> The children work in their own rooms, but they are also free to go into one of the other rooms as the need arises. This may be to work on material unavailable in their own room or to show the children or teacher some project they have completed. . . .
>
> One of the ways in which children learn is by talking, not only formally to the entire class, but to each other. Classes run along these lines are not deathly silent. There is most of the time, a steady hum of conversation, but this does not distract the children who are reading or doing math. What this accomplishes is twofold: it obviates the need for the teacher to enforce absolute silence (which rule of silence actually creates discipline problems), and it enables the children to learn from each other.

Mrs. Hess deals quite adequately with the question of "discipline"—as a teacher herself she knows its importance, and what should and shouldn't be done in its name—and describes the sensible rules they have at PS 84, rules the children accept.

> We want them to learn self-control, but that comes from feeling good about themselves, from knowing they can behave even if no one is watching, from knowing they can learn even if no one is shoving it at them. It's the kind of discipline that creates human beings instead of automatons and though this kind of growth isn't readily measured on tests, it's the kind of growth that fosters learning.

What have they accomplished already at PS 84?

> The thing that pleases me about these classes is that the teacher sees the class not as a mass, but as individuals doing their own work in their own way. Thus the open classroom is offering to every child in it a chance to be himself—a unique person with skills and good qualities, and with weaknesses. It's not going to turn every child into a genius, but it will give him a chance to be as good as he can be. And it will give the teacher that chance, too. That's a great deal.

The reference to "open classroom" made us think of what some critics have remarked—that when Americans adopt the "open classroom" they have a tendency to make it into some kind of system and so lose much of its value. The open classroom cannot be a "system." Apparently, it didn't become one at PS 84.

MANAS is now in its twenty-seventh year, which is a measure of "maturity" for a magazine, and this Department is the same age, having been there at the beginning. In that many years, an editorial office accumulates an enormous amount of material, some of which gets used, while other things are "saved" because they seem worth keeping; so that, after a while, storage and filing get to be serious problems. So, you move things around, and then, sometimes, lovely discoveries are made. One of these was turning up an issue of *Land*, a quarterly published in Columbus, Ohio, which Louis Bromfield probably had a part in starting early in the 40s. The issue we have, for winter, 1947-48—the time when MANAS began publishing—is a real treasure. We got lost in its pages for a couple of hours. Many present-day workers for land reform would value this issue of *Land*, which has 156 pages and is filled with useful material. There are contributions by Ralph Borsodi, Gifford Pinchot, John Collier, Paul B. Sears, and a tribute to Sir Albert Howard by Louis Bromfield and others.

Perhaps the most delighting contribution to the magazine—which, unfortunately, ceased publication in 1954—is by Louis H. Halle, author of *Men and Nations* and other books, who "rereads" and reviews again *Green Mansions*, finding that W. H. Hudson's classic, "far from being a fantasy, is in fact a nature book, to my mind the supreme achievement of our literature in the description of nature." He adds: "No one but a great naturalist, a great observer of living nature, could have written it." Since so many, young and old, have read *Green Mansions* as an exquisite tropical dream, Mr. Halle's review is a splendid illustration of how to appreciate its many-layered excellences. It seems a pity that so fine a piece of writing and analysis should be lost in the back-issue file of a magazine.

FRONTIERS

Starting All Over Again

THAT'S the title that seems to fit the ever-growing mound of papers, magazines, and books on the "Frontiers" table—partly "how to" directions and partly sheer romance in cutting loose from Establishment ideas of food, shelter, clothing, thinking, and living. A few years ago materials of this sort were mostly limited to smudgy mimeographed sheets stapled together or sloppily pasted-up litho jobs. But the time for these ideas had come and now the New York publishers—having learned how from Stewart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog*—are doing it too.

Is there a common denominator for defining all this effort? In *The Savage Mind,* Lévi-Strauss says that the *bricoleur* "is a man who undertakes odd jobs and is a Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself man." He practices the kind of "science" that was once called "primitive" but is now named "prior," and often has very high skill. So these "starting-all-over-again" manuals are rich in bricoleur information, combined with various sorts of "intermediate technology," animated by radical *esprit de corps* and utopian longing. Twenty years from now, they will almost certainly have changed completely the style of reading material and graphic presentation, so that a fresh, looser, much more open "establishment" outlook will eventually emerge.

You could call it humanly relevant science to take the place of the sophisticated techniques of our deadpan technology, practiced with total indifference to the human side of human beings. The revolt began by being nearly "all heart," proudly ignoring any rules or justification beyond the overflowing revolutionary love belonging to life on the barricades. This was the happy childhood of the great change, but now the years of its adolescence are upon us, and the pioneers are reaching after the ingredients of a responsible maturity. The result is a series of eclectic encyclopedias on how to live like human beings in spite of all opposition, hazards, and disdainful noncooperation.

For a beginning there is Lloyd Kahn's rather magnificent book, *Shelter* (11" X 15", 176 pages) available in paperback from Mountain Books, P.O. Box 481I, Santa Barbara, Calif. 93103, for $6 (plus practically a dollar for tax and mailing). Lloyd Kahn wrote the *Dome Books,* but now has what he feels are more basic ideas—more organic, you could say. (See MANAS editorial, Sept. 26, 1973, for his present outlook.) The book is filled with pictures and distilled text covering the resources of the past and present for erecting shelters. It is visually delighting as well as informing. After going through *Shelter,* you have the feeling that you know something about how practical people have solved their housing problems, all over the world, and you have a reservoir of ideas to free associate with on the subject. "This book," Kahn says, "is not based on the idea that everyone can find an acre in the country, or upon a sentimental attachment to the past." He tries to supply "balance between the still-usable skills and wisdom of the past and the sustainable products and inventions of the 20th century." People like Kahn hope to formulate the kind of applied science that will not eventually betray us, but become material structures of a natural and useful life.

Meanwhile, from Schocken come two "Survival Scrapbooks" by Stefan Szeczelkun, one on *Shelter* ($3.95), the other on *Food* ($3.45), with another promised on Energy. These books deal with both wilderness and scavenger arts: "Demonstrating, opening, living, understanding, scratching, needing, surviving, there are new ways to wrest shelter from your environment for those that believe modern clothing and houses are no longer functionally derived from basic physiological needs but are evolved as part of subtle life games." That's the mood, according to the publisher, but people who simply want help in how to make a garden may find *Food* valuable. "Do-it-yourself" is the continuous theme, and if

you know ways to survive in a sparsely inhabited area, then these volumes should prove handy to have around. They are part of the expanding encyclopedia of instructions on how to start all over again—you can't use all of it; it's more than you need to know; but encyclopedias can't help that, and this is the time, apparently, for encyclopedias.

More specific is Wendell Berry's article in *Organic Gardening* for last December, on how to build a composting privy. Berry is among the best of today's writers; he is also a Kentucky farmer, for reasons to be found in his books (see *The Long-Legged House, The Hidden Wound, A Continuous Harmony,* and *The Unforeseen Wilderness*). The privy is for him worth writing about because, as Sir Albert Howard said, successful agriculture exists when there is "correct relation between the processes of growth and the processes of decay." Had we understood this, we'd all now be using composting privies of one sort or another.

Besides precise instruction for building two or three kinds, Berry supplies accompanying reflections:

> One of the dilemmas of the moral consciousness of our time is our complex dependence upon technology and upon public services, which makes it extremely difficult *not* to do what everybody else is doing. People who live in apartment houses or in crowded city blocks can do little on their own to remedy sewage problems.
>
> But those of us who live in the country or on large lots in the suburbs *can* do something on our own.

"Everybody his own paramedic and hygiene instructor" could be the subtitle of *To Your Health* (Grossman, $4.95), another large paperback concerned with natural methods of care of the eyes, feet, hair, skin, teeth, with disciplines for sleeping, dreaming, and eating well. The text is by David Sobel, with diagrams and drawings by Faith Hornbacher. We didn't read every word, but those we did sounded sensible, the only question being: If you made a career out of perfect care of your tired old bod, how would you have time for anything else? But then, this, too, is another encyclopedia, with more in it than you really want to know.

Communities for December-January ($6 a year—Box 426, Louisa, Va. 23093)—has mostly round-up articles on various subjects—including a good one on the big Chinese communes, with material on four kibbutzim. After this survey there is a short conclusion:

> Many possibilities exist making it seem realizable that through decentralization we can reorganize this country while still maintaining industrialization and becoming ecologically positive. Of course, China could become another Russia; Africa and India new centers for uncontrolled development, and North America and Europe continuing decadent continents bent on self-destruction. We do not have the socialist state and its evolution in this country seems unlikely: it's a question of whether the expanding consciousness is enough to turn the tide and develop a new movement in our culture.

Last but not least—in fact, maybe the most—is *Peacemeal*, an extremely practical and inviting cookbook from the Greenwich Village Peace Center ($4 a copy including postage—473 Hudson St., New York, N.Y. 10014): useful to both meatless cooks and carnivores, with garnish you don't ordinarily get in cookbooks, such as an essay on "The Politics of Soup." Once there was a commune in the Village where everybody had a meal that cost each diner 22 cents. . .