

VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY

[This persuasive discussion by the late Richard Gregg, which may now be recognized as prophetic of present-day realizations, is reprinted in somewhat condensed form from the Indian journal, *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* for August, 1936, in which it first appeared.]

I

VOLUNTARY simplicity of living has been advocated and practiced by the founders of most of the great religions—Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tse, Moses and Mohammed—also by many saints and wise men such as St. Francis, John Woolman, the Hindu rishis, the Hebrew prophets, the Moslem sufis; by many artists and scientists; and by such great modern leaders as Lenin and Gandhi. It has been followed also by members of military armies and monastic orders—organizations which have had great and prolonged influence on the world.

Clearly, then, there is or has been some vitally important element in this observance. But the vast quantities of things given to us by modern mass production and commerce, the developments of science and the complexities of existence in modern industrialized countries have raised widespread doubts as to the validity of this practice and principle. Our present "mental climate" is not favorable either to a clear understanding of the value of simplicity or to its practice.

We are not here considering asceticism in the sense of a suppression of instincts. What we mean by voluntary simplicity is not so austere and rigid. Simplicity is a relative matter, depending on climate, customs, culture, the character of the individual. For example, in India, except for those who are trying to imitate Westerners, everyone, wealthy as well as poor, sits on the floor, and there are no chairs. A large number of Americans, poor as well as rich, think they have to own a motor car, and many others consider a telephone

exceedingly important. What is simplicity for an American would be far from simple to a Chinese peasant.

Voluntary simplicity involves both inner and outer condition. It means singleness of purpose, sincerity and honesty within, as well as avoidance of exterior clutter, of many possessions irrelevant to the chief purpose of life. It means an ordering and guiding of our energy and our desires, a partial restraint in some directions in order to secure greater abundance of life in other directions. It involves a deliberate organization of life for a purpose.

Of course, as different people have different purposes in life, what is relevant to the purpose of one person might not be relevant to the purpose of another. Yet it is easy to see that our individual lives and community life would be much changed if every one organized and graded and simplified his purposes so that one purpose would easily dominate all the others, and if each person then reorganized his outer life in accordance with this new arrangement of purposes—discarding possessions and activities irrelevant to the main purpose. The degree of simplification is a matter for each individual to settle for himself.

Since an emphasis on simplicity seems nowadays to many people a mistake, let us consider their doubts.

First of all, modern machine production seems to have solved the age-old condition of scarcity of the material things needed for life. Science and invention, industrialism, commerce and transportation have made it possible to produce and distribute more and better food, clothing, housing materials, tools and equipment, comforts, and luxuries than mankind has ever had hitherto. For an American, a stroll through a ten-cent store, a chain-grocery store and a department

store, followed by a perusal of a catalogue of some of the large mail-order stores, is convincing on that score, to say nothing of what meets our eye on every street. Henry Ford's idea that civilization progresses by the increase in the number of people's desires and their satisfaction, looks sensible. The vast quantities of paper and ink devoted to advertisements add emphasis to that belief. The financial and social stability of every industrialized country seems to be founded on the expectation of an ever-expanding market for mass production. Russia, as well as capitalistic nations, has this aim. The whole world appears to be geared to this concept. Isn't it an anachronism to talk of simplicity in such an age? Complex as our paraphernalia is, does it not protect us against famine, disease, and extremes of temperature? Do not our tractors, electric lights, gas stoves, water pipes, electric refrigerators, house heating, airplanes, steam and motor transport, telephones, lift us beyond the threshold of animal existence, remove from us oppressive fears, give us a sense of security and at least the possibility of leisure? We must surely have leisure if civilization is to advance.

Another doubt comes readily to the mind of every parent. We all want our children to have every advantage, to be healthier and stronger than we have been, to learn more than we did, to make fewer mistakes, to have better characters, to see more of the world, to be able to live fuller and richer lives, to have more power and beauty and joy. How can they in this day acquire the necessary training and education for this, how can they come into contact and association with many people and many beautiful and stimulating things and scenes if we, their parents, cramp our lives and theirs by resorting to simplicity? Do not even their bodies require a great variety of foods in order to be healthy? How is the mind to grow unless it is fed unceasingly from a wide variety of sources? Surely beauty is a most important element in the life of both individuals and communities, and how can we have beauty if we are limited by a drab, severe and monotonous

simplicity of form, line, color, material, texture and tone?

Again, many people who doubt the validity of simplicity would say that if it were put into effect it would extend itself beyond the lives of individuals and claim application to group affairs. They would then naturally say, if many people "go simple," who is going to carry on the necessary complex work of the world? Governments, industries, and institutions have to be carried on and they are highly complex. Are these people who so greatly desire simplicity going to dodge their share in the complex tasks of society? In most organizations power is exercised over people. Is it right for some people to try to escape wielding that power? Who is to wield such power wisely if not those with a conscience? Is it not the duty of sensitive people to grasp power and direct its use as well as possible? Is this cry for simplicity only a camouflage for irresponsibility, for lack of courage or failure of energy?

These questions suggest that in this idea of simplicity there may be a danger to our community life. The existence of a large nation or a large city is nowadays inherently complex. To insist on simplicity and really put it into effect would seem to mean eventually destroying large organizations, and that means our present mode of community and national life.

Let us consider the first major doubt, to the effect that modern science and inventions have made possible a boundless supply of goods and foods of all sorts, so that the ages of scarcity and all the assumptions, thinking and morality based thereon are outmoded, including the idea of there being any value in simplicity.

Although, from an engineering point of view, technology has made it easily possible to supply all of mankind's material needs, this possibility is far from being an actuality. There is a very big "if" attached. Despite the wondrous mechanical, chemical and electrical inventions, scarcity of necessities still exists to a painful degree in every

country. There are large portions of the population of the United States who do not have such comforts as water piped into the house or apartment, and furnaces to provide house warmth in winter. Yet this country is one of the wealthiest and most widely mechanized. Another failure in application of technology is shown by the vast numbers of unemployed in almost all countries—probably more than ever before in the history of the world.

Our financial price system and debt structure controls production, distribution and the wherewithal to pay for consumption. That system operates to cause wheat to be burned in the United States while millions are starving in China: tons of oranges to be left to rot in California while children in our city slums are subject to rickets, bad teeth and other forms of ill health for the lack of vitamins in those oranges; and so on for a long chapter.

The great advances in science and technology have not solved the moral problems of civilization. Those advances have altered the form of some of those problems, greatly increased others, dramatized some, and made others much more difficult of solution. The just distribution of material things is not merely a problem of technique or of organization. It is primarily a moral problem.

In volume III of Arnold J. Toynbee's *Study of History*¹ he discusses the growth of civilizations. For some sixty pages he considers what constitutes the growth of civilization, including in that term growth in wisdom as well as in stature. With immense learning he traces the developments of many civilizations,—Egyptian, Sumeric, Minoan, Hellenic, Syriac, Indic, Iranian, Chinese, Babylonian, Mayan, Japanese, etc. After spreading out the evidence, he comes to the conclusion that real growth of a civilization does not consist of increasing command over the physical environment, nor of increasing command over the human environment (i.e., over the nations or civilizations), but that it lies in what he calls

"etherealization"; a development of intangible relationships. He points out that this process involves both a simplification of the apparatus of life and also a transfer of interest and energy from material things to a higher sphere. He follows Bergson in equating complexity with Matter and simplicity with Life.²

To those who say that machinery and the apparatus of living are merely instruments and devices which are without moral nature in themselves, but which can be used for either good or evil, I would point out that we are all influenced by the tools and means which we use. Again and again in the lives of individuals and of nations we see that when certain means are used vigorously, thoroughly and for a long time, those means assume the character and influence of an end in themselves.³ We become obsessed by our tools. The strong quantitative elements in science, machinery and money, and in their products, tend to make the thinking and life of those who use them mechanistic and divided. The relationships which science, machinery and money create give us more energy outwardly but they live upon and take away from us our inner energy.⁴

We think that our machinery and technology will save us time and give us more leisure, but really they make life more crowded and hurried.⁵ When I install in my house a telephone, I think it will save me all the time and energy of going to market every day, and much going about for making petty inquiries and minor errands to those with whom I have dealings. True, I do use it for those purposes but I also immediately expand the circle of my frequent contacts, and that anticipated leisure time rapidly is filled by telephone calls to me or with engagements I make by the use of it. The motor car has the same effect upon our domestic life. We are all covering much bigger territory than formerly, but the expected access of leisure is conspicuous by its absence. Indeed, where the motor cars are very numerous, you can now, at many times during the day, walk faster than you can go in a taxi or bus.

The mechanized countries are not the countries noted for their leisure. Any traveller to the Orient can testify that the tempo of life there is far more leisurely than it is in the industrialized West. To a lesser degree, the place to find relative leisure in the United States is not in the highly mechanized cities, but in the country.

Moreover, we continually overlook the fact that our obsession with machinery spoils our inner poise and sense of values, without which the time spared from necessitous toil ceases to be leisure and becomes time without meaning, or with sinister meaning—time to be "killed" by movies, radio or watching baseball games, or unemployment with its degradation of morale and personality.

Those who think that complexities of transportation, communication and finance have relieved the world from underfeeding and famine are mistaken. Probably their error comes from the fact that they belong to the comfortable and well-to-do groups among the powerful of the world. They have not understood, if indeed they have read, the statistics and reports of social and relief workers in regard to the extent of undernourishment in their own populations and in the rest of the world.

Those who shudder at the appalling loss of life by the Black Death in mediaeval Europe, forget the tens of millions killed by influenza during the World War. Those who point with pride at the statistics of the lowering incidence of contagious diseases often fail to mention the rising amount of degenerative organic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, kidney, heart and circulatory failures, and of insanity. So distinguished a physiologist as Alexis Carrel in his book, *Man the Unknown*, has given evidence sufficient to startle and humble our pride in respect to the alleged "conquest of disease."⁶ He states that merely increasing the age to which people live tends to add to the number of aged people whom the young must support, and does not necessarily spell progress. He even believes that our modern

techniques for comfort are doing our peoples grave biological harm by atrophying our adaptive mechanisms, to say nothing of the social evils created by industrialism.⁷

No—the way to master the increasing complexity of life is not through more complexity. The way is to turn inward to that which unifies all—not the intellect but the spirit, and then to devise and put into operation new forms and modes of economic and social life that will truly and vigorously express that spirit. As an aid to that and as a corrective to our feverish over-mechanization, simplicity is not outmoded but greatly needed.

There is a doubt whether simplicity is compatible with large organizations of any kind, so that insistence upon simplicity in that field would result in the destruction of large organizations upon which so much of our modern life depends. Correlated with this is a doubt whether the avoidance of exercising power over others, as part of an effort to attain simplicity, is not really a dodging of responsibility. As to these my belief is that our present world has too many occasions and opportunities for the exercise of power over other people. Our great executive organizations—financial, manufacturing, commercial, and governmental—are so large that it is impossible for their chief executive officers to know the full truth about what is happening to the people in them. Indeed, there is sure to be great and constant misunderstanding, injustice and consequent resentment and friction. That is true of all large executive organizations, no matter what their field of action. The larger they are the more certainly does this condition exist. Their very size makes them humanly inefficient, whether or not they are mechanically or financially efficient.

Hence we are unable to wield vast powers without probably doing more harm than good. There is too much concentration of power in the hands of too few people. I agree with Mr. Justice Brandeis that our organizations are too large for

human efficiency. To say that only by the concentration of wealth can we attain great technical advances is not a valid argument, for already our technical development is out of proportion with the rest of our growth. If we want our civilization to last we must prevent megalomania and keep the different departments of our common life in harmony.⁸ We need to decentralize our economic, social and political life. If larger aggregations are desirable for some purposes, it should be possible to integrate the small units more loosely than at present, and for different functions. Such changes would give society greater security, not less. In view of the foregoing ideas and some others I doubt whether complete socialism is an effective answer.

RICHARD B. GREGG

(To be concluded)

NOTES

¹ Oxford University Press, 1934.

² H. Bergson, *Two Aspects of Morals and Religion*, H. Holt & Co.

³ *The Philosophy of "As If,"* by H. Vaihinger, p. xxx, Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York, also an address by John Dewey to the American Philosophical Association, January, 1935.

⁴ See the essay on St. Francis in *Affirmations*, by Havelock Ellis, Houghton, Mifflin, Boston. Also Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, E. P. Dutton Co., New York. *What Is European Civilization?* by Wilhelm Haas, Oxford University Press, 1929.

⁵ *Social Decay and Regeneration*, by R. Austin Freeman, Constable, London, 1921; *Men and Machines*, by Stuart Chase, pp. 350-355, Macmillan; Chapter VIII of *Technics and Civilization*, by Lewis Mumford, Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York, 1934.

⁶ Harper & Bros., pp. 114-116, 154, 155.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 233, 303-304.

⁸ See *The Great Society*, by Graham Wallas, Macmillan; *A Study of History*, by Arnold Toynbee, Vol. III, Oxford University Press; *Technics and Civilization*, by Lewis Mumford, Ch. VIII, Harcourt & Co., New York; *Capitalism and Its Culture*, by Jerome Davis, Ch. IV; *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*, by Berle and Means.

REVIEW

DISTINGUISHED HISTORIAN

WE asked for a review copy of *What Is the Good of History?*—the selected letters of Carl L. Becker, edited by Michael Kammen (Cornell University Press, 1973, \$12.50)—mainly for the reason that, of all the history books we've read, Becker's *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (Yale University Press, 1932) is by far the most unforgettable, and also the most fun, while his *Every Man His Own Historian* (Crofts, 1935) is a collection of essays offering more of the same. Becker was a scholar who seemed able to touch the nerve of the essential human issues in whatever he wrote about; his sophistication is delighting; a low-key humor pervades his work; he is never sententious, and when he informs he does it precisely, as a historian should. Becker was a questioner and a doubter, but with a friendly glow of interest in human beings behind all he asked and said. He might have become a very effective persuader, by reason of his skill as a writer, but an essential honesty directed his mind more to wondering than to certainties.

It was probably inevitable that Becker (1873-1945) should become a professor; he was a natural teacher who understood the uses of learning; and since he came under the influence of Frederick Jackson Turner, inevitable that he should become a professor of history. Yet if you read his books you don't think of him as an "academic," but as a wise, engaging, and completely civilized man who happened, in our time, to find his most useful role in institutions of higher learning. The artificialities of university life and conventions hardly touched him. Although never harsh, Becker was sharply critical of the conceits and follies of colleges and universities, yet he also understood their value and did what he could to improve their quality. He was, you might say, a twentieth-century Erasmus, having the same mellow intelligence and the same deep concern for the common welfare.

What is the "good" of history, according to Becker? *Every Man His Own Historian* provides a modest answer. He concluded, finally, that the study of history is a needed protection against too easy belief and unwarranted prophecy, since men, as they develop, alter their opinions about what is valuable and true. As Becker wrote:

However accurately we may determine the "facts" of history, the facts themselves and our interpretations of them, and our interpretations of our own interpretations, will be seen in a different perspective or a less vivid light as mankind moves into the unknown future. Regarded historically, as a process of becoming, man and his world can obviously be understood only tentatively, since it is by definition something still in the making, something as yet unfinished. Unfortunately for the "permanent contribution" and the universally valid philosophy, time passes; time, the enemy of man as the Greeks thought; tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace, and all our yesterdays diminish and grow dim: so that, in the lengthening perspective of the centuries, even the most striking events (the Declaration of Independence, the French Revolution, the Great War itself; like the Diet of Worms before them, like the signing of the Magna Carta and the coronation of Charlemagne and the crossing of the Rubicon and the battle of Marathon) must inevitably, for posterity, fade away into pale replicas of the original picture, for each succeeding generation losing, as they recede into a more distant past, some significance that once was noted in them, some quality of enchantment that once was theirs.

You can trust such a man enough to go to school to him.

Well, had Becker no "biases"? Are there not prejudices the reader must guard against? The fact is that we encounter bias and preconception everywhere; from them there is no possible escape. What is rare, and should be sought, is the art and practice of identifying them, mainly in oneself, since it is much easier to see them in others. This is where Becker shines. In a letter written in 1923, discussing Oswald Garrison Villard's severe attack on Woodrow Wilson for the mess of the Versailles Treaty, he said:

When Wilson came back I had a grudge against him which lasted for some time. I was indignant at

something I supposed he had done or left undone. But one day I said to myself: Why are you angry with Wilson? What has he done to you? Are you then a party man, with a cause to serve? Perhaps you ought to be out putting up the barricades, or get yourself a stiletto so that you can stab the enemy in the back? But if you are a historian, endeavoring to understand this damnable world, what have you to do with anger? You will never understand Wilson by getting angry with him. Then I realized that what I was angry with was myself; I was angry to think that having studied history for twenty-five years I was still so stupid as not to have foreseen that after such a war the peace of Versailles was precisely what one might have expected. I had had a moment of optimism, had experienced a faint hope that Wilson might do what he wished to do. When he failed, I was angry because I had failed to see that he must fail; and took it out on Wilson.

Carl Becker called himself a "liberal," a term that is now almost an epithet. For him, the word had a wholly honorable meaning, as a letter written in 1933 makes clear:

Dear Mr. Spitzer:

I signed your petition and am enclosing a small check all in behalf of the right of free speech. This I do because I am a liberal who believes that free speech is desirable, even for those who do not believe in it. I never could understand, however, how a communist, on his own principles, can claim the right of free speech, or expect to be granted it willingly. Communism, as I understand it, preaches the social revolution, the suppression by force of certain classes of people, and of all free speech for those who refuse to support the communist ideal. You, if you are a communist, therefore, are essentially asking for free speech in order to establish a system which will deny free speech. Since you appeal to force I can understand why you should *resist* oppression, but not why you should *resent* it. What the Hitlerites are doing to the Communists is exactly what the communists would do to the Hitlerites if they (the Communists) were in power. If I, a liberal, wish communists to have free speech in this country it is not to advance their cause, but because I believe they will be weaker if let alone than if they are repressed.

Becker believed that the historian ought to be something of a psychologist. In a letter to Arthur M. Schlesinger in 1918, he showed how

psychological insight would temper historical judgments:

One thing I think we have to avoid, which I have always felt Beard and people of his way of thinking do not altogether do: and that is the assumption that the men who had property and sought to protect it were somehow conscious hypocrites. This comes from an inadequate psychology. Every class acts in general, taking men by and large, along the line of its economic interests; and yet the great majority are honest and sincere enough in their profession of "principles." We all have a wonderful talent for identifying our interests with the cosmic purpose, but we do it honestly enough for the most part.—& the men who profess principles designed to enable them to keep their property are not any the less, on that account, good patriots, than those who profess principles designed to get it away from them.

The most charming (and revealing) of Becker's letters are those to Frederick Jackson Turner, under whom he studied at the University of Wisconsin, and the ones to Leo Gershey, a student whom he admired and encouraged. It seems likely that the high regard Becker felt for his teacher was naturally translated into thoughtful guidance and concern for his students; at any rate, these letters are especially good for their portrait of Becker as both student and teacher, showing his warmth, humor, and at the same time his civilized distance from the vulgarities and superficialities of the age. While his most pervasive quality is balance—understanding entered into his strongest judgments—he never let academic custom or convenience confine his views. In 1911 he told a contemporary that "two thirds of the theses published in this country are not worth publishing," since they are "rushed into print before the author has mastered his subject or attained maturity enough to see it in any sort of perspective." He condemned the multiplication of departments in universities at the expense of the quality of those which existed, and did not hesitate to express his views to administrators. He wrote to the president of Cornell while he was teaching there:

I think I can see well enough the defects of universities, Cornell included. In my view universities commit three deadly sins—expansion, mechanization, standardization. I think most faculty men and most presidents and deans (although we of the faculties love to pass the buck to presidents and deans) are aware of these deadly sins and wish not to commit them. But in spite of the best intentions we commit them more or less.

Becker felt that Cornell offended least in these directions and said that it sometimes seemed that "Mr. White [Cornell's first president] must have created it for my special benefit." Becker's comments on examinations, made in a letter to *Time*, are worth repeating. *Time* had said that he sometimes forgot to give examinations, implying that he thought them unimportant. Becker replied:

I am not opposed to examinations. Examinations are very useful as a means of determining whether a student should have a degree, and a degree is a useful thing to have, although it has little or nothing to do with education. I get a reputation for being opposed to examinations because I insist on attributing to them the value which they have and not the value which they haven't.

After he left the University of Kansas, where he taught for fourteen years, Becker responded to an invitation to say what he thought of conditions there, speaking of the meaningless expansion that had taken place. His criticism included the following:

What is the need of a special department of journalism? Young men are there taught, for the most part, precisely what they would have to learn, and would easily learn, in a newspaper office—the mechanics of printing, the knack of getting news, and of warping facts to make a good story. They ought to get in the university the things they can't get in a newspaper office, the things they will never get adequately if they do not get them in a university. What they need, if they wish to be anything more than smart reporters, is a fundamental grounding in history, economics English literature, politics and law. A very good course for prospective journalists could be made on the basis of these subjects; but a department of journalism, by stressing the superficial things, makes it less possible for the student to get as much of these subjects as he should.

What Is the Good of History? is a book filled with this sort of common sense, along with pleasantries, some philosophizing, and the measured humanist musings of a man resolved never to fool either himself or anyone else. No one with an interest in education should pass this book by.

COMMENTARY
RICHARD B. GREGG

OUR lead article for this week and next week—"Voluntary Simplicity"—came as a discovery by William S. Coperthwaite, of the Yurt Foundation, Bucks Harbor, Maine 04168. He sent it to us as a memorial to the man known best to American readers as the author of *The Power of Non-Violence*—the book that was first in importance in starting a cycle of Gandhian thinking in the United States. Richard Gregg died a few months ago. We are glad to be able to publish this article as a memorial, but even more for its clear direction for today.

Bill Coperthwaite has some recollections of Richard Gregg which may serve as introduction:

We first met nearly twenty years ago—I was twenty-five and he was near to seventy. In his writing I had found a kindred spirit and so sought him out to thank him. It turned out a joyous event. It was exciting to find that this gentle, white-haired man, with such wide knowledge of the world had long before discovered many of the things I was finding true in my world—the joy of bread labor; the importance of the hands in education; simple living; the wonders of the technology of early peoples; and the relationship of these to non-violence.

An hour's talk lengthened to a weekend; the weekend was followed by others; and the time stretched quietly into years. . . . Age difference seemed of no consequence. He was as agile in body as in mind and when we walked in rough fields and woods together he was as nimble as a boy.

His library was an open treasure house. It was he who introduced me to natural living, to Gandhi's work, to nonviolence, to simplicity. When I was hard-put to find support for my beliefs, he encouraged me with Thoreau's *Gnaw your own bone. Gnaw it. Bury it. Unearth it and gnaw it still.*

Humor was as much a part of him as gentleness. One limerick ran:

There was an old fellow from Leeds
And simple indeed were his needs
 To save him the toil
 Of tilling the soil
He just ate the packet of seeds.

Workers for peace have an incalculable debt to Richard Gregg. He was one of those—all too few—who not only knew Gandhi but understood him. He wanted most for others to learn from Gandhi what Gandhi knew, because this meant growing in independent, self-reliant strength. Richard Gregg wrote other books. The one we remember best (published in both India and America—here by Richard Grossman) is *Compass for Civilization*. It shows his ability to express deep philosophical ideas with inviting felicity. Its title may stand for the man, since it sums up the longing—indeed the achievement—of his life.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

JOHN HOLT WRITES AGAIN

JOHN Horis new book, *Escape from Childhood* (Dutton, \$7.95), at first brought some worrisome thoughts—it seemed that he was going political, wanting to legislate justice and even decency to children. After all, education is essentially a trusting relationship. If you try to compel by law what can only come as the natural result of trust, you create distrust on a larger scale, and then the lawmaking process is launched on a spiral of escalation.

The first man to warn against legislating what ought to come naturally was Lao tse; and so far as we know, the first modern commentator to recognize the import of this part of the *Tao Te Ching* was Holmes Welch. Mr. Welch says in *Taoism: The Parting of the Way*:

Lao Tzu believes that man's original nature was kind and mild, and that it has become aggressive as a reaction to the force of legal and moral codes. This is the basis for some surprising statements. "Banish human kindness, discard morality, and the people will become dutiful and compassionate"; "It was when the great Tao declined that human kindness and morality arose. . . .It was after the six family relationships disintegrated, there was 'filial piety' and 'parental love.' Not until the country fell into chaos and misrule did we hear of loyal ministers." Thus Lao Tzu reverses the causal relationship which most of us would read into such events. It was not that people began preaching about "loyal ministers" because ministers were no longer loyal: rather, ministers were no longer loyal because of the preaching, i.e., because society was trying to *make* them loyal.

Mr. Holt shows in the first chapter of this book that he feels adult attitudes toward children have deteriorated to the point where the young must be protected from abuse and injustice by legislation. He says:

By now I have come to feel that the fact of being a "child," of being wholly subservient and dependent, of being seen by older people as a mixture of

expensive nuisance, slave, and super-pet, does most young people more harm than good.

I propose that the rights, privileges, duties, responsibilities of adult citizens be made *available* to any young person, of whatever age, who wants to make use of them. These would include, among others:

1. The right to equal treatment at the hands of the law—*i.e.*, the right, in any situation, to be treated no worse than an adult would be.
2. The right to vote, and take full part in political affairs.
3. The right to be legally responsible for one's life and acts.
4. The right to work, for money.
5. The right to privacy.
6. The right to financial independence and responsibility—*i.e.*, the right to own, buy, and sell property, to borrow money, establish credit, sign contracts, etc.
7. The right to direct and manage one's education.
8. The right to travel, to live away from home, to choose or make one's home.
9. The right to receive from the state whatever minimum income it may guarantee to adult citizens.
10. The right to make and enter into, on a basis of mutual consent, quasi-familial relationships outside one's immediate family—*i.e.*, the right to seek and choose guardians other than one's own parents and to be legally dependent on them.
11. The right to do, in general, what any adult may legally do.

In his last chapter, Mr. Holt illustrates approaches to these goals in terms of the work of various organizational programs, and by citing legislative measures such as the banning of corporal punishment in the schools. He quotes from *Time* (Aug. 27, 1973) the proposal of a panel on youth of the President's Science Advisory Committee, advocating "more work and less school for young Americans." The idea is to promote adult capacities in the young from fourteen to twenty-four and to "counteract the isolation and passivity of school." Mr. Holt notes that this suggestion is what Paul Goodman wrote

and talked about for years. According to the *Time* story:

The panel's most provocative proposal is to get the young out of schools earlier and into other organizations. Hospitals, symphony orchestras, department stores and factories all are urged to experiment with such a plan, taking on youngsters from age 16, using them for whatever labor they can perform, while teaching them further skills and overseeing their formal schooling. . . . It might also move toward an even older pattern—apprenticeship.

It seems only yesterday that all the "good people" were solidly behind the anti-child-labor laws! But now the idea is to free the young from the peonage of economic dependence and the unimaginative routines of bureaucratically managed compulsory schooling!

What sort of society has to pass laws to prevent the exploitation of children—and then, a few decades later, needs other laws to reform the abuses which have grown up around these protective measures?

The answer seems to be: a law-and-order society—that is, a society which regards man-made ordinances as the sole or chief source of effective morality.

An appropriate comment may be: If dependence upon coercive or restrictive measures has grown so extensive, and the need for them so urgent that a man like John Holt finds it desirable to write a book advocating legal protection of children—to help free them from the arbitrary control, psychological abuse, and typical injustice of childhood—then we cannot be said to have a humane society. Perhaps we have never had one, and the qualities of human behavior only seem worse, today, for the reason that so many more of the relationships of life are under institutional and political management. In addition, there are a lot more people, and their lives are increasingly arranged in crowds. Powerlessness and crowding increase the occasions for carelessness and cruelty.

When understanding, love, and trust are not enough, then law—however imperfectly—must fill the moral vacuum. This seems the justification for Mr. Holt's book, or for its recommendations. Yet happily, saying this misrepresents the actual content of the book, for Mr. Holt's contributions and efforts are, and have been through the years, always in behalf of greater understanding, love and trust of children. *Escape from Childhood* continues the development of these themes. It contains much material like the following:

I recall a conversation I once heard between a mother and her thirteen-year-old daughter. The daughter was talking very positively about something of great importance to her. The mother, a most tactful and respectful woman, who was then, as always, very interested in anything her daughter has to say, was listening intently, commenting now and then. Suddenly the thought came to her, as she has told me it often does, "Can it really be that this remarkable young human being, holding forth here in front of me on so many topics advancing so positively into the world, is my child? The same little person that I have been living with all these years? And thinking this she was overcome by a flood of memories and feelings. Her expression changed in a very subtle way; she looked at the daughter with a wondering amusement and tenderness. There was no condescension in it, nothing but the greatest affection; but for the moment the present child disappeared, or at the very least was joined by all the past children she had been. The daughter spotted this and realized that for the instant she was no longer there to her mother as a real person, but only as My Child. She was deeply offended and broke off her conversation. Though her mother, and I too, tried to get her to go on, the thread of contact had been broken, and she would not start talking again. But only for a short time; she knows that her mother very much respects her as a person, and in an hour or so we were conversing once more.

This shows the characteristic quality of Mr. Holt's thought. He gives colorful reality to subtle human relationships, helping us all to become more self-watchful, more *deliberately* careful of the feelings and integrities of others—especially the young—and to recognize the excellences and delicacies which are able to flower when nurtured by awareness in family and social life.

FRONTIERS

Views on Technology

COMMENTS found along the way in *World Trends and Alternative Futures*, a recent paper by John McHale and Magda Cordell, will probably be of most interest to the general reader. (The paper was published last January by the East-West Center, 1777 East-West Road, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822.) Noting "explosive growth" in the human capacity to affect and alter the natural and institutional environment during recent years, the authors speak of the "lag in the conceptual grasp of this transformation." One effect of economic growth has been the increasing interdependence of the technologically developed nations. But while there is increase in cooperative international projects, other signs are less encouraging:

The most swiftly growing areas of the world economy are no longer national undertakings but multinational corporations. Of the hundred largest economic entities in the world, more than half are corporations whose annual budgetary turnovers are much greater than those of many nations. These organizations are unprecedented in their size, their globally diffused operations, and their growing autonomy across national boundaries.

Meanwhile, the less developed nations are not catching up with the industrialized nations. On the question of aid, the authors observe:

In 1971, 120 nations spent 216 billion dollars on military expenditures, an increase of 82 per cent since 1960. Global economic aid was only 4 per cent of this amount.

Another comment:

When we talk piously about the need for the poorer nations to help themselves, and the economic difficulties of increasing aid for development, we may note that, from 1950 onwards, the U.S.A. alone has given away 36.2 billion dollars in arms, apart from its sales of 17.6 billion.

Overall we use globally, for military purposes, from 12 to 15 per cent of the world's output of goods and services and more than 50 million people, excluding the 23 million actually under arms.

In evidence of the failure to understand the impact of "growth," the authors note: "Though we are almost three-quarters of the way into the twentieth century, most of the institutionalized ways of conducting our social, political, and economic affairs are still those of the pre-industrial era, when all societies endured on a basis of competitive marginal survival." For this reason, perhaps, there is a weakening of faith in the dominant institutions: "Politics as core institution may even have begun to lose its centrality as a societal force in the same way that organized religion has lost its centrality as the dominant social institution in many societies during the past century."

A final observation:

The so-called "mass" societies brought into being by industrialization are, in their advanced stages, actually more "individualized" and differentiated than pre-industrial or early industrial societies. They are certainly less homogeneous and uniform than the peasant village and less constraining in terms of variety of social roles and available life-styles. The supposed acquisitive materialism of the "technological society" has an oddly contradictory flavor when the trend seems to be towards less material attachment, ownership, and domination by the "value" of physical possession in itself.

Perhaps "materialism" is on the wane among some of the young, and there is no doubt about the differentiation of individual activities and relationships. But there are other ways to look at these things. For example, in an article which appeared in the London *Guardian* for June 15, 1973, Ivan Illich wrote:

The model American male spends more than 1,500 hours a year on his car: driving or sitting in it, parking or searching for it; earning enough to pay for the vehicle, the toll the tires, the insurance or the highway tax. . . . What distinguishes the traffic in rich countries from the traffic in very poor countries is not more effective locomotion, but compulsory consumption of high doses of energy packaged by transport.

At some point of energy consumption the transportation industry dictates the social

configuration of space. Highways expand and move fields beyond the distance farmers can walk, and ambulances remove the clinic beyond the few miles which the sick child can be carried. . . . With its impact on the geography, the industry finally shapes a new kind of man: the habitual passenger. . . . The folly of transport-based traffic escapes the grasp of the habitual passenger. His perceptions of life-space and life-time have been industrially distorted. He has lost the ability to conceive of himself outside the passenger role. He has become impotent and cannot establish his domain by walking nor gather with others who share it. He has lost the confidence that he could meet people under his own power and face remoteness if he were on his own. He has been conditioned to the illusion that freedom of movement depends on being rushed around.

Illich draws various conclusions:

A country can be classified as over-industrialized when its social life is dominated by the transportation industry, which has come to determine its class privileges, to accentuate its time-scarcity and to tie its people more tightly to the tracks that it lays out for them. At what precise level of per capita output and in what order each of these effects will become intolerable to the enlightened self-interest of a political community, only that community can decide. . . .

To accept the rich man's version of energy scarcity means choosing modernized poverty instead of rational technology. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to face the facts which this so-called "crisis" obscures: the impact of industrial levels of energy on any social environment tends to be just as inevitably destructive as the impact on the physical milieu. . . . Ecologists are right in asserting that non-metabolic power always pollutes. Just as inevitably, beyond a certain threshold, mechanical horsepower corrupts.

What would a "rational technology" be like? Gandhi thought the sewing machine was a good example of rational technology. Illich has high praise for the bicycle. John Seymour, an English farmer who says that England could feed all her people by a proper use of the land, would recommend tools that don't require "dark satanic mills" to produce them, and machines that don't eliminate men, don't consume fossil fuels, and

don't lead to a scale of operations requiring the use of chemical fertilizers.