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THE USES OF LANGUAGE

THE failure of human beings to understand one another is explained in *Genesis* as divinely instituted, an "act of God" intended to inhibit the collaboration of men in building a tower to reach to heaven, this being a brash technological vanity that Jehovah could not allow. Before the attempt to erect the Tower of Babel, all people spoke a common tongue. So the Lord "did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did scatter them abroad."

To Lord Bacon we owe the expression "confusion of tongues," which he called "a second curse," suggesting that men have sought to overcome it "by the art of grammar." It is not clear whether Bacon believed that the confusion could actually be dispelled in this way, and we know that language sometimes compounds misunderstanding. Linguists give us to understand that some grammars are less confusing than others, but no one proposes that language itself should be able to guarantee perfect communication. Where does the trouble lie? We can make little of the implication that men once understood each other perfectly, and that this capacity could then be taken from them as a punishment for pride.

Well, we have an idea of "working understanding." This means that two persons in conversation endow the words they use with the same basic meanings, make the same assumptions about the way things work, and reach conclusions according to the same rules. But we also agree that beyond certain common-sense limits, this ideal is wildly utopian. People acquire their feelings about the meanings of words in different ways, it following that even rigorously grammatical sentences often need explanatory glosses. The habit of scientific writers to define their terms at the outset is evidence of this. Science, moreover, gains its famous exactitude by strict limitation of meaning. Scientific language is abstract language, deliberately one-dimensional or unambiguous. It attempts to divorce its words from their metaphysical origins. It freezes their meaning at the level of objectivity—the kind of objectivity which gives impartial access to various observers or experimenters—and virtually bonds natural reality with the terms of scientific epistemology. All specialized languages have these or analogous tendencies, but the scientific language is probably the best developed and the most familiar example. It is also guilty of the most self-esteem.

The language of literature is left splendidly ambiguous to keep meanings *open.* Poets and essayists often write better than they know. We can't explain this, yet we know it happens. How can we tell? We can tell by reason of the common impression that great works have a life of their own. Genius outdoes itself. A great work continually calls up new resonances in its readers, giving it larger life and extended meaning. Thus the true being of the work is in its potentialities, in its *reach,* which submits to no scale of finite measures. Its greatness is like the spread of a high enthusiasm among a population of humans; it is absolutely real, and completely impossible to calibrate save by ridiculously coarse and insensitive markers. This is not to say that the language of literature cannot be precise, but that its exactitudes run along invisible axes. Human feeling is purely subjective, yet it has precisions which are real even though they translate poorly into words. It has heights and depths. The same might be said of moral conceptions, considered as a class of subjective structures. Ideas about the forms and ranges of awareness indicate another series of subjective structures. Scripture and poetry represent the sort of objectivity we are able to give to feeling, so that it may be shared, while

ethics and metaphysics do the same for the other areas mentioned. The fine distinctions found in great works on these subjects establish that precision is an essential in such matters.

But what of the "confusion of tongues"? Is it in us, showing that we have not yet learned how to talk about the world and ourselves? Or does the confusion simply mirror intrinsic attributes of both the world and ourselves, so that while our language may be improved, it cannot hope to achieve exact correspondence with "reality"?

Arguments about grammar we leave to those more competent—to men like Benjamin Lee Whorf and Noam Chomsky. What then about our knowledge of the world and ourselves, a matter on which there are and can be no authoritative specialists?

The question is about "understanding," which the confusion of tongues is alleged to frustrate. Conceivably, we need neither Scriptural nor Baconian assistance. What we are after is an explanation of the imperfection of both the world and ourselves.

So set, the inquiry brings a natural way of thinking. Imperfection causes pain, and pain provokes thought. What we know absolutely requires no thought. It has the certainty of the abstraction, *Cogito, ergo sum*, which doesn't say everything—does it say much or little?—but has the virtue of being indisputable. What we *don't* know can only mean something we do have an idea of, but know little about, since what we don't know at all cannot even occur to us. So, all thought in pursuit of knowledge is by definition relative in content and achievement. Absolute knowledge would dissolve thought—and also, of course, language. James Stephens begins *The Crock of Gold* by describing two philosophers who sit opposite one another, not needing to speak because they "understand" each other so well. Perhaps they once spoke, but no more. Now their ideas simply flow back and forth, each having perfect comprehension. One may imagine that the time will come when even the flow of ideas will cease—when each has reached to the outermost rim of the thought potentialities of the other. Indeed, a no-growth situation.

So it is the limitations on understanding that we want to know about.

A proverb attributed to Madame de Staël runs:

> To understand is to pardon. To understand everything is to forgive everything.

Thomas a Kempis had said more simply:

> Know all and you will pardon all.

To which Unamuno rejoined:

> He who understands everything understands nothing, and he who forgives everything forgives nothing.

They are all three right—of course. But how are they right?

In *A Bar of Shadow* Laurens van der Post tells the story of an English army officer who spent years of World War II in a Japanese POW camp. He suffered much at the hands of a ruthless sergeant. Later the sergeant is tried as a war criminal and hanged. The book is about how the Englishman comes to understand the Japanese sergeant, and not merely to "forgive" him, but to feel for him what amounts to love. Slowly, the reader is drawn to see into the inner life of the sergeant, starting with that moment when, as a boy of seventeen, alone at night on a silent hillside, he pledged his life to his emperor, and then conducted himself in fulfillment of that devotion until the very end. When reproached by the Englishman for requiring so much from his POW labor force, the sergeant explained indignantly that he would have demanded even more of Japanese soldiers. Manhood and dignity, as he understood it, set the standards of what should be done. He ruled and punished as an impersonal instrument of what he believed, in terms of military ideals and Spartan discipline and the accountability of men. After the execution,

the Englishman, who had fruitlessly tried to save the sergeant's life, mused to a friend:

> It was not as if he had sinned against his own lights if ever a person had been true to himself and the twilight glimmers in him, it was this terrible little man. He may have done wrong for the right reasons, but how could it be squared by us by now doing right in the wrong way? No punishment I could think of could restore the past could be more futile and more calculated even to give the discredited past a new lease of life in the present than this sort of uncomprehending and uncomprehended vengeance.

There is exquisite and precise understanding here, affecting for the reader, even at second hand.

Not all offenders against our law—or any law—can be so nobly exculpated, yet the principle is clear: the feeling brought to van der Post by his growing understanding was the emotion of a common identity, something grander by far than "forgiveness." Involved are flows of comprehension, of rivers of assent, of exchanges within the self.

For these things to happen to us, we need the experience or the book. The experience, we could say, is better than the book. Those months and years under the hot sun, under the eye and the gun of a fierce enemy—and then to recognize the awful intensity of his sense of duty, to feel something of what he felt and then to honor it—who could duplicate all that from just a book? Well, but not all men would be inclined or able to learn what van der Post learned from the experience. (He had himself been a prisoner of the Japanese.) Only a certain breadth of being opened him to the understanding revealed in the book. So, for some, reading the book might be better than having the experience. For some the experience might have meant no more than personal destruction or dark embitterment. The extremes and nuances of meaning to be found in such ordeals must be virtually infinite. A work of art, which selects and develops one possibility, has therefore unique value.

But if van der Post had understood "all," he could hardly have written about the experience. Unamuno is right. Knowing all, he would have had no call to reason with himself. The light comes from the reasoning, and its candle-power from the feeling, from the longing which gave life and heart to his thought.

How do *we* understand the passage in van der Post's book? Only by a lightning-like series of hardly noticed references to analogues in our own experience, all run together perhaps, into intimations of the same truth already stored in our inner library. Van der Post, you could say, calls these analogues up in the mind; he summons them; he induces us to gather out of our vast network of recollections, assimilated memories, and half-digested impressions a response that, as it matures, turns into illumination. We have a sense of *understanding.*

This is the transaction we complete with the artist, the writer, the thinker. It leaves us with an increment of knowledge, relative because not complete, indefinite because it may grow into something with wider application, always gloriously imprecise, just as any living thing is imprecise, although truer, we may add, than the most imposing item of "exact knowledge." Why should it be "truer"? Well, truth is what extends the radius of our being, making our understanding more inclusive.

Why don't we study treatises about "truth," then, instead of quoting novels?

We may be able to do just that, some day, when we acquire the necessary strength of mind. Meanwhile, it is useful to consider why the novel is so instructive in terms of "understanding. "

Consider the contrast between the objective and the subjective forms of experience—which together include all the raw materials of understanding. The novel puts the two together—or, rather, does not separate them. There is, somehow or other, continual interchange between these two worlds going on in our minds,

affecting our feelings, shaping our judgments, stretching our conceptions, precipitating our decisions, adding and subtracting, baffling and clarifying, leading and denying. It never stops; most of the time we don't notice the process—not any more than a carpenter notices his hammer, until he misses or mars the wood. We can tolerate only a limited amount of generalization restricted to either world; beyond that point, the conceptions pale or the images pall. Since life is a stream of alternations between the subjective and the objective, and is filled with subtle connections between the two, so communication about life must be similarly balanced, enlivened, relieved, charged and recharged, for it to have the feel of reality. Thus a philosopher who is also a teacher will use homely illustrations. Like Antaeus, he touches the earth again and again to regain strength for flights and encounters in the free spaces of subjectivity. Plato talks of chairs, tables, books, blacksmiths, and pictures. The *Upanishads* speak of rivers, swans, seeds, salt water, fire, and other elements. The universe of thought is a universe of analogues and correspondences. Thinking is the art of generating the feeling of reality; and knowing is living in the generated reality and finding it faithful to all else that we know.

The confusion of tongues comes from the nature of perception. When you look at a thing, and strive to know it—know all about it—you shut out everything else. Your stance as observer is yours, and only yours, so no one else will see exactly as you see; or even *what you* see. Who can say how much of the nature of an object is determined by the perception of it? The thing-in-itself is an object only for mystics, and they say that when you know the thing-in-itself, the knowing makes it into a subject; so, again, who can say how much of the nature of an object is determined by the perception of it?

Generalizations are attempts to correct for the particularity of individual stances of observation, and something more, besides. They try to get at the essential things of the world, no matter who looks at it. The truth in generalizations hits us, wins acceptance from us, at a level of our being which has wider ranges of awareness than sense perception, and is more generous than personal feeling. We couldn't really talk to each other at all, as humans do, without these wider ranges of perception. Symbols are the tools of such communication. Symbols represent general ideas. They stand for a plane of man's being. They stand for something lost and something gained. The particular is lost, the general is gained. The problem for human beings is to recognize that general ideas, to have vital truth-content, must retain inclusive touch with the gamut of immediate experience, for only then can they take the place of the particular, yet have for the individual both the same and a deeper reality. The mind is the field and alembic where the particular is extrapolated into the general by the transmuting power of self-consciousness. How much particular experience do we need in order to accomplish this? The question can have only a statistical answer. The inferences from particulars to general conclusions are formal in the case of hypotheses, but limbs of a single organism, no longer theory but reality, when knowledge is gained. Truth has this consequence: the differentiation of perception into the polarities of thought and feeling is dissolved by the full act of knowing.

There is a puzzle here. We are what we know, but we do not know what we are. Who has not been overtaken by feelings that declare we are much more than we know—or, sometimes, much less? Who is constant in self-knowledge?

Hence the Socratic enterprise. For feelings, which are plainly the energy of knowledge, are also the stuff of illusion. How could it be otherwise, since all knowledge is relative? To say "knowledge is" at the same time postulates something unknown. Absolute knowledge has no "existence"—it does not, that is, "stand out." It may have a subtle reality beyond the veil of

opposites and contrasts, but not as a part of our finite or measurable experience. The mystic reaches outside space and time, then makes poetry about the Ineffable, as he must or should—if he can.

But there is another kind of poetry—if we take poetry to mean the generation of feeling which has in it the intimation of reality, some magical correspondence to the fabric of life. This other kind of poetry is what Plato was against. It offends by lending specious finality to the relative, the incomplete, the imperfect, the egocentric, and the vain. This use of feeling to mislead, to create satisfaction with the immature, to win admiration for the undeveloped, to gain acceptance of the partisan half-truth, the glamorous deception, the exploitingly guileful—is an art of propaganda. Its discipline is rhetoric, the technique of persuasion. Its end is the human use of human beings for ends not in themselves.

So the full human being must be able to rise above feeling in order to choose the feeling to which he will respond. He must be more than a feeling being to be a *human* being. This was Plato's insistent claim and the foundation of his educational regimen for the philosopher-king. We see, in Eric Havelock's fine summary of the Platonic conception of self-knowledge, how this spells out in terms of the intellectual and emotional currency of Greek life:

> When confronted with an Achilles, we can say, here is a man of strong character, definite personality, great energy and forceful decision, but it would be equally true to say here is a man to whom it has not occurred, and to whom it cannot occur, that he has a personality apart from the pattern of his acts. His acts are responses to his situation, and are governed by remembered examples of previous acts by previous strong men. The Greek tongue therefore, as long as it is the speech of men who have remained in the Greek sense "musical" and have surrendered themselves to the spell of tradition, cannot frame words to express the conviction that "I" am one thing and the tradition is another, that "I" can stand apart from tradition and examine it, that "I" can and should break the spell of its hypnotic force, and that "I" should divert at least some of my mental powers away from memorisation and direct them instead into channels of critical enquiry and analysis. The Greek ego in order to achieve that kind of cultural experience which after Plato became possible and then normal must stop identifying itself successively with a whole series of polymorphic vivid narrative situations; must stop re-enacting the whole scale of the emotions, of challenge, and of love, and hate and fear and despair and joy, in which the characters of an epic become involved. It must stop splitting itself into an endless series of moods. It must separate itself out and by an effort of sheer will must rally itself to a point where it can say "I am I, an autonomous little universe of my own, able to speak, think and act in independence of what I happen to remember." This amounts to accepting the premise that there is a "me," a "self," a "soul," a consciousness which is self-governing and which discovers the reason for acting in itself rather than an imitation of the poetic experience.

Notice the words used by Havelock—the quotation is from his *Preface to Plato* (Harvard University Press, 1963): During pre-Platonic times, the Greek language "cannot frame words to express the conviction that 'I' am one thing and the tradition is another"—it cannot declare that the "I" has the innate power to know itself apart from its circumstances, its time, its web of personal experience. That distinction between subject and object, that level of the purified sense of self—which Plato held to be the region of true knowledge and the source of wisdom—depended upon developing the power to perceive its reality—although, at first, it was only hypothesis: the Platonic Theory of Ideas.

Well, there are other considerations and problems. No one can successfully talk about subjectivity and objectivity at the same time. You can't look in two directions at once. Language is an art whose highest achievement is in defying and seeming, sometimes, to overcome this absolute limitation. For this it uses symbols, silences, and paradoxes. The end of thought is self-transcendence, which puts an end to thought. Meanwhile, language accurately represents the human situation—or misrepresents it, as humans are wont to do.

REVIEW
FACT AND VISION

RODERICK SEIDENBERG'S *Post-Historic Man* first appeared twenty-four years ago and is now available in a Viking paperback ($2.75) with a new preface by the author written a few months before he died. Seidenberg understood the tensions and dilemmas of our time, enabling him to focus the issue of human freedom in the framework of present-day circumstances and tendencies. He joined his artist's need and ability to make wholes (he was an architect) with comprehensive mastery of the limited scientific insights of the age. The result is a prose that delights and involves the reader, despite the often recondite level of the inquiry. The book may be taken as a model of concerned philosophical research.

Seidenberg sets the central problem again and again. This passage, quoted from the chapter on Historic Determinism, is more inclusive than some others:

> Man today is aware of living in a grave period of transition. Having attained in the long course of his development a sense of infinite freedom and responsibility—a sense of the "infinite worth of the individual"—he now finds himself in the grip of contrary centripetal forces that draw him, irresistibly, into ever more rigorous orbits of collective procedure. The traditional freedom of the individual, thus narrowed by the organized patterns of collective society, no longer sustains a sense of inward autonomy: as the wells of inward values are drained, the nuclear sense of the person as the source of free choice and of values must likewise vanish. It is as though man had achieved for a brief moment, as a transitional being, a perspective of far-off values—a vision of spiritual freedom—only to be swept under by the force of his own numbers, like the molecules . . whose individual freedom of action gives rise in the aggregate to the most precise laws and the most rigid conformity. For the common denominator of human actions, crystallized in the norms of organized social patterns, expresses only the implicit and attainable averages of human hopes, wishes, endeavors, and capacities. It is the very force of these averages that constitutes the sense of an emerging historical determinism—the sense of man as a collective entity molded and crystallized into organized forms by the overwhelming momentum of his numbers. The dominance of the collective aspects of man is inherently assured; and with it the gradual conversion of the individual into a frictionless and depersonalized member of the community. For the individual as such will be absorbed in the shadow of his collectivized self. The process, as we shall see, is irreversible and implicit: history moves in only one direction—"inert and unerring, she flows toward her goal."

This is a virtually metaphysical statement of the scheme of human self-defeat which Seidenberg describes with loathing yet meticulous attention to operational detail. The conformities required by technological necessity are shown to be an ever tightening web of determinism. More generally, the course of human development is seen as a passage from the rule of instinct (which establishes the laws of behavior in nature) to governance by reason (which requires the feeling of freedom for its operation), and then on to the rigidities of rational technology. Under this latter regime we attain to the uniform and dependable perfection of machine-like organization, but at the cost of the freedom through which the system was devised. This loss of freedom puts an end to individual human choice, and without choice there is no history. Hence Seidenberg's title—Post-Historic Man.

How shall we characterize this book? It is a study of the implications of the second law of thermodynamics—the cosmic drift to entropy—since loss of freedom is for the subjective individual submission to entropy. It is an examination of instinct and a comparison of its limited infallibilities with the unlimited uncertainties of intelligence. It is a sociology in which binding observance is increasingly derived from technological imperatives. Yet such imperatives which take over the management of human behavior may have existed before they became concretely visible—externalized—in the machine and in engineering techniques. Combing social history for early examples of this tendency,

Seidenberg remarks: "It is noteworthy, as Lewis Mumford has ably shown in his *Technics and Civilization*, that the regularity of ritual and regime in the monastic orders served as a precursor to the machine; and that clocks, registering and facilitating this order, were, significantly enough, among the earliest examples of mechanical instruments."

Seidenberg is a Renaissance Man, a lover and champion of freedom who finds it necessary to define and count the enemies of freedom, as discerned in the cosmic process, in biological structuring, in political and socio-economic organization. Throughout his book he seems to be asking—Is freedom-loving, spiritual man an alien here? Has he no natural place or part in the work of the world? Must participation in earthly processes dehumanize him? The moral strength of Seidenberg's inquiry is in this continual questioning. Against it, on the scales of experience and human history, lies the dead weight of recorded facts.

Man began his history-making with the dawn of consciousness of direction and capacity for choice:

> Henceforth he was to pursue his course under a twofold compulsion: that of instinct and that of intelligence. But a strange fatality now descended upon him: the two forces proved unequal, and he thus found himself diverging ever farther from his instinctual harmony along a precarious path of unstable syntheses. And that path is history.
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> If history is indeed the conscious and possibly culminating phase of this disparity, it may be viewed as a vast and complex movement of transition in the total perspective of man's development. And as the process or conflict of history had its origin in the remote depths of the past, so its ultimate resolution may conceivably be protracted into an equally distant future. In any event, the character of the process as we have come to know it in the light of our limited insight and experience appears self-contained: the arc of its trajectory, far from pointing to some boundless transfiguration in the destiny of man, gives evidence, on the contrary, of a set span and a definable course. Only in the high moment of this transition, projected through the supreme consciousness of mystic and seer, has it been given to mankind to glimpse a vision of transfinite being. But thanks to the sweep and surge of overwhelming historic forces, this vision, it is clear, is destined to be dimmed and perhaps forever extinguished. For the vision is not yet reality; and man is free only in the sense of perceiving his bondage under the impact of forces beyond his control. In their farthest reaches man's aspirations are but tangential projections of his ardent insight; and as his fate traces the curve of its appointed path, the dream of an otherworldly destiny will fade and disappear—a Fata Morgana of his will to unattainable perfection. In its place we will see, ever more clearly, the established direction and set course in the drift of history.

This is a melancholy if splendid rhetoric. It is the mournful cry of Prometheus, chained to the rock—of the lonely and apparently deserted and doomed visionaries of all time. How can the prison of circumstance and enveloping "order" be reconciled with what we feel in our hearts and elaborate so longingly with and in our minds?

What does the testimony of human aspiration *mean,* to which the world we live in presents such massive contradiction? This is Seidenberg's essential and besetting question.

Conceivably, the question can never be answered in terms of our familiar assumptions about the nature of man. Only what may seem the most free-wheeling metaphysical speculation—proposing new (or very old) solutions—can satisfy its yearnings. For we want both the dreams of our heart and the facts of the world to find confirmation, and for this we must begin by declaring that man's spirit is his primary reality—a spark, if you will, of divinity, of the One—which we know, which is immediately given, as consciousness. Freedom of causation is the dynamic of consciousness—which accounts for our dreams; while bondage to effects is the defining nature of the objective world called "real." We become conscious of this duality of being and order when we inhabit and make use of the bodies the world provides. The Primordial Self, as a *Upanishad* says, is "that which is supreme and not supreme." That Self, a

commentator suggests, is supreme as cause, but not supreme as effect. Interpreting, we might explain that we *feel* our supremacy as cause, since our consciousness is a spark of the Infinite, but *encounter* the limitations and laws of the world of effects—finding ourselves bound by them, and constrained in ways which frustrate the spirit within. Hence the pain of conscious being, the contradictions of the Promethean life of man as the link between heaven and earth.

One could say that Roderick Seidenberg's book is a richly varied account of the ranges in which those contradictions are experienced—or suffered—by human beings. Understood in this way, it may be read as a valuable study of the human situation—and struggle—at man's present level of development.

COMMENTARY
TWO ACTS OF A DRAMA

A BOOK like Seidenberg's *Post-Historic Man* stirs the opposition of the reader to its metaphysical doctrine of doom. Can it be possible that the vision of freedom is only a will-o-the-wisp, a mirage of sentiments that the forces of historic development will finally erase, putting an end to history as well?

Seidenberg was a reluctant doom-sayer. Like a covert Quixote, he tilted at the melancholy structures of his argument from the seclusion of footnotes. He occasionally reminded his readers of the immunity of mystics and seers to the pessimism implicit in the march toward absolute conformity. Yet he was shy about giving hope a rational ground. Other books published soon after *Post-Historic Man* were similar in mood. Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society* made a Frankenstein of technology, while Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* proposed that the Great Refusal of artists and revolutionaries has been rendered ineffectual by the homogenization of culture—a necessity of the technocratic ideology.

These books came out in the 1960s. During the early years of the 70s another note was struck. In *Where the Wasteland Ends* Theodore Roszak added to his critique of scientific objectivity a championship of the affirmative rationalism of the romantic poets. In various writings, L. L. Whyte attacked the obsessive preoccupation of scientific thinkers with the second law of thermodynamics, pointing to the omnipresence of formative intelligence in nature and man. Lewis Mumford ended *The Pentagon of Power* with an appeal for turning our "elaborate mechanical equipment" to the service of an organic existence which finds guidance in the analogy of nature.

> It is from the organic world in its entirety, not merely from a swollen fragment of man's mind, his technique for handling abstract symbols, that the materials for further development are to be drawn. Once the new organic world picture becomes intelligible and acceptable, the ancient "myth of the machine," from which our compulsive technocratic errors and misdirections are largely derived, will no longer keep its grip on modern man.

These themes, while they do not change the facts of our circumstances, have the power to alter human attitudes toward those facts. Changed attitudes make it possible to put human motives and purposes at the helm of decision.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
AN OLD TRUTH

REGULAR reading about the problems of education and its offenses against the young is likely to produce in the reviewer a zealot's desire to lead all these confused experts and critics back to the Ancient Simplicities—to the truths people have always known, but are too easily distracted from. And then, of course, as the regular reading is continued, it becomes evident that many of even the recent reforms attempted in education are some version of the Ancient Simplicities, now dressed in new language and identified as breakthroughs which "modern research" has made possible.

There is also the fact that these discoveries are indeed "breakthroughs" for some people, their apparent novelty being due to changed circumstances and the heightened self-consciousness of the times. Perhaps the old truths are acceptable today only after they have been translated into our conceptual vocabulary. Why, then, don't the old truths—if they are truths—work better for us? The answer may be that, diminished or complicated by contemporary language, they say either too little or too much.

This grows very abstract. Illustration is available in an article by Frederick L. Redefer, a professor emeritus of higher education, in *Saturday Review/World* for July 27. Redefer begins by recalling George S. Counts' question to progressive educators in 1932: "Dare the schools build a new social order?" Dewey, it will be recalled, had given the Progressive Education movement its theme by pointing out that children learn best when doing things that interest them, and the things that interest them are what grown-ups are doing out in the world. But Counts, you could say, didn't admire what the grown-ups were doing with the world, and he proposed a program of social change, to be started in the schools. Prof. Redefer summarizes:

> Counts contended that if schools were to build a new social order, they would have to drop their Deweyan child-centeredness, come to grips with planning an education for social change, cease to allow the individual child to do only what he wanted to do, and help young people to understand and cope with the problems of the times. In this way, schools would be building for a new social order.

Well, it didn't work. Or it wasn't really tried. Redefer suggests that there was no clear direction on how the schools could build a new social order:

> Counts was not specific as to how it should be done or what the curriculum should be. He was even less specific about the new social order, except that privilege was to be stripped from the few and that democratic planning would create a society with low unemployment, better housing, and better health.

Prof. Redefer thinks that the situation today is much the same as in 1932, but with international and other problems added to the inequities of the depression days of the 30s; and that the time has come to reorganize higher education with a view to preparing students for a world in which pollution, diminishing resources, and nuclear war have become major threats to survival. He says:

> The world confrontation, the shock of Watergate, the lack of ethics in high places, and the commercialization of American culture have convinced some that a new education is necessary if we are to educate a younger generation that is concerned, committed, and prepared to create a better society. . . .
>
> America is now questioning its values and is more aware than ever before that changes must come. Is this not the time to develop purposes for education and to create a new education in some schools and colleges by some of the faculty? Is it not a time when a social purpose for education can be found and a commitment to an improved world accepted? Must we wait for society to change before colleges do?

What is the assumption of this proposal? It is that an institutional change, brought about in places of higher education, can improve society at large.

What ancient simplicity applies here? It is that the entire community educates and molds. How the community grows better remains something of a mystery, but that its influence rules was the conclusion of the Greeks, who had a word for it—*Paideia.* But Paideia, as the total effect of Hellenic culture on Greek youth, was not merely the imprint

of the existing society. It included communication of ideals of human character. As Werner Jaeger says (in *Paideia*):

> It is a mark of the close connection between the productive artistic and intellectual life and the community that the greatest Greeks always felt they were its servants. This attitude is well known in the East also: it seems to be the most natural in a state where life is organized by quasi-religious rules. Yet the great men of Greece came forward not to utter the word of God, but to teach the people what they themselves knew, and to give shape to their ideals. Even when they spoke in the form of religious inspiration, they translated their inspiration into personal knowledge and personal form. But personal as it might be in shape and purpose, they themselves felt it fully and compellingly social. The Greek trinity of poet, statesman, and sage embodied the nation's highest ideal of leadership. In that atmosphere of spiritual liberty, bound by deep knowledge (as if by a divine law) to the service of the community, the Greek creative genius conceived and attained that lofty educational ideal which sets it far above the more superficial artistic and intellectual brilliance of our individualistic civilization. That is what lifts classical Greek literature out of the category of pure aesthetics, in which many have vainly tried to understand it, and gives it the immeasurable influence on human nature which it has exercised for thousands of years.

What then is our Ancient Simplicity? It is that the greatest Greeks saturated the Greek *polis* with noble ideals of human excellence, attainment, and virtue, and that the community, in turn, transmitted these ideals and influences to the young by divers means, including literature and the arts.

How is this simplicity repeated today? A recent version is the one provided by Ivan Illich, who wants to deschool society and restore the function of education to the community, which would carry on this function through a variety of conscious agencies. An earlier realization of this simplicity was expressed by Arthur Morgan when, after giving fourteen years to the rehabilitation of Antioch College, he said that the shaping of men takes place earlier within the community, and that the college years are too late for decisive influence on the formation of character. By reason of this discovery, Morgan is devoting the rest of his extraordinarily long life (he is now ninety-six) to the regeneration, inspiration, and new formation of morally healthy small communities.

Another distinguished educator of our time, Robert M. Hutchins, Prof. Redefer says, "has given up reforming higher education and calls for reforming society first." In all likelihood, Dr. Hutchins' choice of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions as a focus for his efforts, after his experience at the University of Chicago, reflected the growing conviction that the schools could not be any better than the community at large. Paul Goodman was explicit on the subject:

> There is a line of critics from Lao-tse and Socrates to Carl Rogers who assert there is no such thing as teaching, of either science or virtue; and there is strong empirical evidence that schooling has little effect on either vocational ability or citizenship . . . in all societies, both primitive and highly civilized, until quite recently most education of most children has occurred incidentally. Adults do their work and other social tasks; children are not excluded, are paid attention to and learn to be included. The children are not "taught." . . . In Greek *paideia,* the entire framework of institutions the *polis,* was thought of as importantly an educator.

Well, in order to recreate *paideia,* we have to *do something,* don't we? And doesn't "reforming society," Prof. Redefer asks, "require a better-educated citizenry and a different education *among the faculty itself?"*

But this would be the case only if we continue to look to the schools for change and reconstruction in society. The Greeks, let us note, didn't look to the schools. They hardly had any, and in those days "higher education" was mostly in the hands of the Sophists, who finally succeeded in corrupting the Athenian ideal. The Greeks relied on their great men to give the community, as educator, the inspiration it required. Yes, they relied on them, but not often or consistently enough.

FRONTIERS

Addiction: Various Sorts

IN a brief essay in the *Nation* for Aug. 17, Jennifer Cross discusses the complex disaster disclosed or implied by the testimony of "several hundred doctors, dieticians, educators, food manufacturers, consumerists and food faddists" before a Senate committee on Nutrition and Human Needs. Inflation has come close to doubling the amount of poverty-related hunger in the world. The well-to-do nations indulge luxurious eating habits which deprive people elsewhere of adequate nourishment. Yet while prosperous Americans have plenty or too much to eat, many of them eat the wrong thing. They eat "too much meat, eggs, fat (especially saturated fat), salt, sugar, coffee and alcohol." High blood pressure afflicts twenty-five million Americans, surely related to the fact that coronary heart disease causes 38 per cent of all deaths. Other increasing ills are diabetes mellitus and gallstones, while the livers of fifteen million Americans are threatened by drinking. Miss Cross says:

> One reason for unwise eating is that people increasingly prefer snacking to three square meals, and fewer women prepare food from scratch—hence they buy more processed, snack and "fast" foods. It does not take a dietician to realize how many of these are fatty, salty, clog the arteries and embellish the waistline. Unfortunately they are also found to be delicious to the point of being addictive; coffee, sugar and alcohol are quite literally so.

Billions are spent by the food industry to advertise these products; in consequence, "the nutrition education provided by TV is practically nil." Nor are the reforms now suggested novel. Thousands of excellent proposals and programs, accumulated over years, gather dust in government and other files. Miss Cross is only keeping us up to date, not telling us anything new. The pattern is put in a couple of sentences: "Well-motivated people suggest humane and necessary reforms, but these will not be carried out because they run counter to the interests of the power structure." Example last summer:

> On the same day that doctors on the Nutrition Study emphasized that we should eat less meat, U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Earl S. Butz instructed American housewives that buying more meat was their patriotic duty. While the study produced figures showing that meat production was a costly and inefficient way to use world grain resources Congress hastily debated a bill which would bail out overstocked cattlemen once again with government loans, and Butz—though school was just out—announced bulk-meat purchases for the school lunch program. As the consumer panel bravely recommended that food advertising on children's TV be banned, or at least restricted, Marian Burros, a panel member, reported on NBC-TV that the Federal Trade Commission, which had been working for months on a children's TV advertising code, had been so intimidated by the food industry's objections that it hadn't even dared to publish its preliminary proposals.

The Nutrition Study proposed a federal "department of nutrition," but the *Nation* writer asks:

> . . . how do you get a top-level nutrition department when the present Administration is not interested either in nutrition or in tacking another layer onto government bureaucracy? And even if you got one, what assurance would there be that it would not go the way of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the FTC and the Food and Drug Administration—which is to say, be either captured by big business or cowed into varying degrees of inactivity? . . . What can improved nutrition education accomplish without corresponding changes in food marketing practice and industrial structure? . . . The road is not going to be easy. Very profound changes must occur in the basic political and economic systems, not to mention the eating habits of whole nations. Are we going to *plan* these changes, and for the dislocation that will follow, or will we let time and accident decide?

There are other discouragements, but these will do for the present. Implicitly, Miss Cross thinks in terms of massive, collective change. The proposal of the Nutrition Study, she says, does not "come to terms with the politics of its concern." Yet one would suppose it evident, from the facts she has collected, that such changes are not accomplished by political means.

We can think of two ways to consider this problem. One is simply to quote the first two paragraphs of a letter which appeared in the London anarchist weekly, *Freedom* (June 15)

> In FREEDOM of April 13, the editor complains that "More anarchists are needed in order to bring about social change in this society." How can anybody create a sufficient number of anarchists if the members of the society do not feel themselves the need of such a change? An anarchist is not made by order, but by a long process of mental evolution. If you hope and think you can influence a big majority of our sadistic society to embrace the anarchist ideal in the near future, you are very naive.
>
> If you feel the urgent need to do what you are doing and derive satisfaction from it, that in itself is reward enough and one can be glad that he has dedicated his life to a worthy purpose, even if the goal wasn't achieved.

The other approach to the problem might involve, for a start, reading Robert Heilbroner's *The Human Prospect* (Norton, 1974). His major conclusion is that the methods that Americans have used in the past, and which seemed to bring such great success, simply don't *work* any more. The question is, why? It seems obvious that we have claimed inherent virtue for our political system and our national character and that, having accomplished so much, we still believe we can solve our present problems by the means which probably created them. Hence the unceasing flow of articles which declare what we *must* do in political terms.

Heilbroner, however, points out that the American triumphs had vast subsidies from both nature and historical accident, and that this assistance is now about used up. Moreover, there seem to be natural limits to technological advance. For example, as Jennifer Cross says, "the agricultural revolution is running out of steam in this country." She quotes Dr. Jean Mayer, the Nutrition Study Coordinator, who said:

> We are on the diminishing returns part of the curve in the relationship of production to fertilizer. The same million tons of fertilizer which would produce 22 million tons of grain in India will only produce 11 million tons here. It is going to cost $750 million, according to the best estimates to produce the same amount of grain and ship it to India . . . three times the $250 million it would cost to produce the fertilizer and send it to India.

The *Nation* contributor speaks of the "very profound changes" which need to occur. Some thinking about what is revealed by Heilbroner's book might get us started on changes which would at least not be "very naïve."