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# LANGUAGE AND BEYOND

TEACHERS, Ortega declared in a remarkable essay on education, too easily become frauds. Why? Because, if they imagine that their task is only to pass on existing knowledge to the coming generation, and if they win acceptance for this idea from their pupils, then they are not really teachers but collaborators with the status quo. And the one thing certain about the status quo is that it must and will change. Human history—the history we record and relate to our children—is about such changes and about the men and women who accomplish them.

Yet thorough knowledge of the status quo remains necessary. It is what we have to work with, and if we remain ignorant of this raw material we'll make no changes worth noticing. So, we might say that teaching is showing how to turn the knowledge of the status quo into its own critic and reformer. The future will be the revised and reborn present. And education is training in the art of knowing what to take hold of and what to let go.

Ortega put it simply, using a student of science for illustration:

> It is enough to compare the approach of a man who is going to study an already-existing science with the approach of a man who feels a real, sincere, and genuine need for it. The former will tend not to question the content of the science, not to criticize it; on the contrary, he will tend to comfort himself by thinking that the content of the science which already exists has a defined value, is pure truth. What he seeks is simply to assimilate it as it already is. On the other hand, the man who is needful of a science, he who feels the profound necessity of truth, will approach this bit of readymade knowledge with caution, full of suspicion and prejudice, submitting it to criticism, even assuming in advance that what the book says is not true. In short, for the very reason that he needs, with such deep anguish, to know, he will think that this knowledge does not exist, and he will manage to unmake what is presented as already made. It is men like this who are constantly correcting, renewing, recreating science. (*Some Lessons in Metaphysics*, Norton, 1969.)

Here Ortega seems a dispenser of indisputable truth about human beings and the way in which progress is achieved, yet he also sets a serious problem. How many, among a given number of students—a hundred, or even a thousand—will be of the sort he describes? We might urge that they *all* ought to be like that, but we know they are not. Only a few qualify for what amounts to the heroic role of innovator or reformer or discoverer—since so few have a genuine hunger to know—and fewer still the capacity to endure the cost exacted for knowing what is against the grain of the times.

If this is the case, and it seems to be, then how shall we arrange our educational programs? Plans and arrangements for mass education will certainly stand in the way of originality and innovation. (The greatest good for the greatest number.) Well, we could say that there are always obstacles in the way of original thinkers—life is like that. But should it be? We are speaking of education and are assuming we have a hand in deciding what is to be done for the coming generation. Ortega's answer is: *Don't* transmit the cultural heritage as established fact. Teach it as the present form of make-do and then arouse, if you can, the hunger to know.

But there are all those people satisfied with what their fathers and mothers believed, and they slow everything down. They do indeed. Yet who, after all, knows the optimum rate of progress in awakening the hunger to know? This is a situation in which each one must do the best he can. It is absolutely impossible to legislate or compel human beings to hunger for knowledge.

Everything said here about teaching also applies to writing—writing, that is, to communicate something worth saying. Not all writing, of course, has educational purpose. A successful short-story writer once warned a young man who wanted to write for the pulps, "Avoid originality as you would an argument on religion." To amuse or entertain, you must make your audience comfortable. This has nothing to do with improving their minds. We improve ourselves through shock and wonder, and the fine writer is capable of producing both responses. This is the writing we are concerned with here.

Now we come to another problem—a special problem of the writer, but also of all human beings. We use words. Words are not things. Words are not knowledge. They may conceal, fool, bewilder, or enrage instead of informing or enlightening. Moreover, life is a flow, but converted into words, life gets chopped up. People call this distortion "linear thinking," and the comment has validity. But without linear thinking we couldn't make abstractions and develop ideas such as the science of dynamics, isolating the *principles* of motion, so that we are able to control it in numerous useful (or destructive) ways. So there is abstract language, the scientific language we put into books for people who want to be scientists and engineers. Yet the flow of nature hardly gets into these books. The books are written in our practical interest, not nature's. They are not philosophy. Philosophy is the asking of ultimate question and the proposing of tentative answers. It is a rule in philosophy that there will *always* be a better answer.

For several centuries, now, it has been believed the when some branch of the uncertain enterprise called philosophy is put into practical hands, then and only then will reliable answers, which can be called scientific, result. Action has finality, so when we act we leave our philosophical uncertainties behind, or think we do. But then, after a century or two, perhaps, the science breaks down. It doesn't work in some crucial area of discovery. This causes a terrible shake-up, sometimes called a scientific revolution. Thomas S. Kuhn has written a valuable book about such changes—*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 1970). What happens is that some one abandons current scientific certainty and goes back in to philosophy for a *new idea*—a meaning for the science which was not there before. Jacob Bronowski in a seminal article (*American Scholar,* Spring, 1966) called this an "act of self-reference." What else could you call it?

He says:

> How does the outstanding scientist come to propose such a decisive axiom, while less imaginative minds go on tinkering with the old system? How did Gregor Mendel leap to conceive the statistical axioms of genetics? What moved Albert Einstein to make the constancy of the speed of light not a consequence but an axiom in the construction of relativity?
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> An obvious answer is that the great mind, like the small, experiments with different alternatives, works out their consequences for some distance, and thereupon guesses (much like a chessplayer) that one move will generate richer possibilities than the rest. But this answer only shifts the question from one foot to the other. It still remains to ask how the great mind comes to guess better than another, and to make leaps that turn out to lead further and deeper than yours or mine.
>
> We do not know; and there is no logical way in which we can know, or can formalize the pregnant decision. The step by which a new axiom is added cannot itself be mechanized. It is a free play of the mind, an invention outside the logical processes. This is the central act of imagination in science, and it is in all respects like any similar act in literature. In this respect, science and literature are alike: in both of them, the mind decides to enrich the system as it stands by an addition which is made by an unmechanical act of free choice.

Philosophy is the region and discipline of self-reference. It is timeless or immortal for the reason that its work is never finished, its system never closed. The sciences are the mortal children of philosophy. We are comfortable with and profit

by their finiteness, which makes their practicality, returning to philosophy for help only when they fail. There is this interesting paragraph in Bronowski:

> It is clear enough that statements in philosophy are, by their nature, often dogged by self-reference, and that philosophy as a discipline is therefore limited even more severely than science by the logical gaps that the theorems of Gödel and Tarski have laid bare. In mathematics and science, it is a surprise to find oneself bounded by these theorems; it is not at all obvious, and indeed is unexpected to learn that mathematical and scientific statements cannot be wholly cleared of self-reference (or of some equivalent recursive regress). Indeed it is clear that, while mathematics and science are subject to it only from time to time, when a new step has to be taken, philosophy is subject to it severely and constantly because self-reference is built into its very method.

Now we return to literature, language, and words. There is a world—call it a world of ideas fathered by philosophy and born of literature in a body of words—which has immeasurable and continuous impact on the "real" world in which we live. This man-made world of ideas, which we continually add to and subtract from, is the humanly devised *logos,* an imperfect, if sometimes inspiring, intellectual surrounding. How shall we make our logos, our universe of words, correspond more closely to the real world? Sometimes we attempt it by writing poetry or composing hymns. The emotion generated by the arts is not flattened out on a plane surface; it is not linear; it has depth and dimension and enables us to *feel* what the real world is like. One may suppose, then, that the truest science would evolve as an art-form, and would, for those capable of knowing it, reveal truth as indisputable as the sun in the sky!

It is tempting to say that this would be truth beyond words, and indeed, if the chopping-up process that words compel is a mutilation of reality, then the *actual* truth must be beyond words. But this may be regarded as ridiculous. We *require* words in order to examine the validity of the claim to truth. So, of necessity, we chop things up, interrupting the flow of meaning or life, and then, if the logic holds good—and if the conclusion checks with experience—we may try to restore the meaning to its original form as an unbroken flow. That is, we ought to do this. Words are only half-way houses.

Well, there will be those to point out how much nonverbal communication there is in the world. Biologists tell us about the language of the bees, and of fish, and dancers and mimes demonstrate the rippling communication of body movement and gesture. But what about ideas as such? Can they pass between humans without needing words? Could we perhaps learn to enjoy communion with each other, not using voiced speech and chopped up grammatical constructions? Was the original Word—the Logos of the Greeks—which began the great flow of all being—an expression of Intelligent Life before meaning had to be stepped down into words? Could humans get beyond their struggle with language to participate in communication like that?

The path back to philosophy for answers to such questions may be by way of the infant science of psychic research. But first a common-sense inquiry. When a builder asks you what kind of a house you would like, you tell him something specific, although he may help with suggestions. You say how many rooms you need—whether you want block construction or boards and bats—what sort of heating arrangement you prefer. You do your best to be unambiguous. He is a builder and is going to estimate the cost. You use for this what Ortega calls "readymade knowledge." But if your young son or any child asks you another sort of question, you may not give him an unambiguous answer. You may see an opportunity to invite him to think it out for himself. So you give him a riddle, or some of the ingredients and a little hint. Learning how to make an act of discovery is the important thing for the child, not adding up lots of little bits of information he collects from adults.

The Oracle of Delphi may have followed a similar principle. Both Greeks and foreigners came to Delphi with momentous questions on their minds. Should we go to war? If we do, can we win? Is this a good time for a colonizing expedition? Sometimes the Oracle would give an ambiguous answer. The key to the Pythia's meaning had to be discovered by the inquirer himself, or he would mistake the sense of the reply. He had to find a way to go behind words. There are times when a flat answer is the worst thing there is for a questioner. What he says he wants to know is not at all what he needs to know. Wise words then become masks of meaning. The answer becomes a clue to a better question. This is done with words, in order to fulfill a purpose that cannot be served by words.

Another question: What kind of knowing does not need words or is inevitably mutilated by words? Is it a knowing beyond words in the same sense that the experience of seeing a color is suggested hardly at all by giving in numbers its rate of vibration? And what about the flow of thought from one mind to another, without the medium of speech between them—telepathy? When one person is able to see an idea or an image in another person's mind, sometimes in quite accurate detail, we have communication without words, and putting it into words afterward can seldom duplicate the full quality of the common experience.

Speaking of such communication, Prof. H. H. Price wrote in the British journal, *Philosophy* (October, 1940):

> Now I think this has an important philosophical consequence. The plain man, and even the plain philosopher, assumes with Descartes that the world of minds is divided up into a number of mental substances. No mind, it is supposed, has direct causal relations with any other mind, nor indeed with anything at all except its own brain. But it now appears that this view is true only of the conscious part of our mental life. When we consider unconscious mental processes those which their owner is not, or perhaps cannot be, aware of by introspection—there seems to be no such isolation. It appears that my unconscious may on occasion stand in direct causal relations with yours. (I do not like this language much, but it is the only one available at present, so I must use it.) . . .

Prof. Price now asks an extremely interesting question:

> Is it possible that when we discuss causal hypotheses about Telepathy we are asking the wrong question? Perhaps the right question to ask, anyhow at the beginning, is not "Why does Telepathy occur sometimes?" but rather "Why doesn't it occur all the time?" . . . If we approach the matter in this way, there is one biological point which strikes us at once. *Too much* Telepathy would be paralysing to action.

This would be the case if human beings had some special work to do or project to accomplish here on earth. Perhaps we couldn't live here without the slowing down of communication according to the requirements of speech through bodily organs—and perhaps, too, there is a parallel low-key telepathic process which goes on between people while they talk, although masked by our conversational voices.

Turning to clairvoyance, Prof. Price asks the same question:

> Why is our ordinary perceptual experience limited in the way that it is? Why is it confined to those material objects which happen to exercise a physical erect upon our sense-organs? Ought we perhaps to assume that Clairvoyance is our normal state, and that ordinary perception is something subnormal, a kind of myopia? The question you ask depends on the expectation with which you begin. Ought we to have expected by rights, so to speak, every mind would be aware of everything or, at any rate, of an indefinitely wide range of things? The puzzle would then be to explain why the ordinary human mind is in fact aware of so little. We might then conjecture that our sense-organs and afferent nerves . . . are arranged *to prevent us from attending* to more than a small bit of the material world—that bit which is relevant to us as animal organisms. . . . In that case, what prevents us from being clairvoyant all the time is—in M. Bergson's phrase—*I'attention à la vie.* If so, we should expect that clairvoyants would be physiologically or psycho-physically "abnormal" or "unbalanced"; or at any rate that their "balance"—I have to speak in metaphors again—would be more easily upset than other people's.

Well, the upshot of this idea for language and words would be that here, in our everyday world, have to do, yet there are, so to speak, "leaks" from that other state of being where we are all and ideas from that world require the highest powers of the imagination if we are to put them admit, the words may seem sadly inadequate.

What would be the language of a race of Bellamy thought they wouldn't have any, since the need for it would die in terms of living thought. There might be other consequences. In his story of a man cast away on This May Come," *Harper's Monthly*, 1889), Bellamy has the lost traveler describe his

> I wanted to run away and hide myself. If I analyzed my feeling, it did not seem to arise so much secrets, as from the knowledge of a swarm of fatuous, ill-natured, and unseemly thoughts and half-thoughts which it was insufferable that any person should peruse in however benevolent a spirit.

written language only to chronicle the past:

> It appears that for a long period after mind-language disused, but also written, no records whatever being kept during this period. The delight mind-to-mind vision, whereby pictures of the total mental state were communicated, instead of the at best could give, induced an invincible distaste for the laborious impotence of language.

historical purposes, and also trained a group of interpreters to be able to speak, mostly in English, usually English sailors. In all else there was only direct communication by thought from ego to ego.

their true being, leading to a rather high condition:

> The effect of such a philosophy as this—which consciousness than a philosophy—must obviously be to impart sense of wonderful superiority to the serenity in the midst of the haps and mishaps which threaten or befall the personality. They did indeed be, lords of themselves.

Small wonder that Prof. Price, thinking along explanation to the metaphysical system of Leibniz, *Monadology* "every monad has occasionally and exceptionally, but always, as part of its essential nature." A monadic soul, then, such faculties through the senses and organs, very nearly losing them in the process, and needing the experiences had by intelligence locked within organisms.

expressions, may reflect glints of that higher state of consciousness, for telling about which words same means—the use of words—we are able to consider such possibilities, and also to order our disciplines of language, grammar and logic, provide. We must do this until we acquire, like knowledge of the flow of being and idea as things-in-themselves.

# *REVIEW*
## AMERICA'S UNHONORED DREAM

IN *Inventing America*, Garry Wills sets out to demythologize the Declaration of Independence. He does this by considering three versions. First there was Thomas Jefferson's intended meaning. Jefferson, Mr. Wills shows, was a man of the Enlightenment who went at things in what he regarded as the scientific spirit. Then there was the adopted version of the Declaration, which embodied the changes in Jefferson's wording made by the men of the Continental Congress. Finally, there is the popular meaning that the Declaration took on, its operative symbolism in American life.

The author seems to have two purposes in view. One is to reveal Jefferson as he was, and not as the myth of the Declaration and simplifying tradition have made him. The other is to place the occasion and meaning of the Declaration in historical perspective, and thus to separate the reality from the myth.

One picks up this book with certain wonderings. Mr. Wills' articulate prose and scholarly criticism are impressive. But why did this often brilliant writer devote his exceptional talents to a subject like Richard Nixon, in *Nixon Agonistes*? Even after reading it, you still wanted to know why. The book seemed a waste of literary capacity.

The present book puts the wondering in another key. One cannot help but admire the meticulous care with which this study of the Declaration of Independence has been put together. The reader is obliged to go with the author back to the scenes of 1776 and after, learning, for example, that the Declaration was not signed on the fourth of July. The actual vote was on the second of the month, and not all the colonies were represented, some delegates then still waiting for instruction from home. Formal unanimous signing took place on August 2. Curiously, little importance was attached to this signing, and apparently many of the delegates forgot when they had first put down their names. Mr. Wills says:

> The fact that many Signers had such poor memories of what happened in July, 1776—memories distorted less than a decade after the event—reinforces my argument . . . that the men who passed the Declaration had no idea it would become as important as it did. Yet the memorial signing of the handsomely engrossed text also indicates the path this symbol would take over subsequent years, becoming a cult object whose importance was only loosely connected to its original purpose, argument, or legal standing. It became a paradoxically "conservative" symbol of a new thing's past. It would in time become doubly "radical"—both rooted and deracinating—in ways no one, even Jefferson himself, could have expected.

It seems inevitable that brief accounts of the founding of the United States should focus on colorful events such as the Boston Tea Party, Paul Revere's ride, and the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Mr. Wills is concerned with the resulting simplifications and distortions.

He thinks that they are romantically mythic and on occasion largely misleading. He says that the Declaration was important to the signers only as a way of letting the nations of the world know that the former colonies were ready to receive help in their struggle with Britain:

> Not one country, but thirteen separate ones, came into existence when the Declaration was at last made unanimous on July 19, 1776—the plan of future confederation was left undecided at that time. It is sometimes said that Jefferson's document set up a new form of government "by the people." That was not even true of the general basis given for popular government—that doctrine was drawn from the Glorious Revolution, to have most force in a petitioning process based on that precedent. But in a more basic sense, Jefferson could not establish any new government because all the colonies had expressly instructed their delegates *not* to do any such thing when declaring independence. Each new state would establish its own constitution, then agree on later terms of alliance with the others. . . .
>
> In the midst of a war, while forming constitutions in their own provinces, men obviously felt that the treaty and articles were more difficult

> projects of practical politics, and set more useful or dangerous legal precedents, than the Declaration itself. The latter was not a legislative instrument. Its issuance was a propaganda adjunct to the act of declaring independence on July 2—and that act, in turn, was just the necessary step toward the two projects men were principally wrestling with. . . .
>
> The Declaration had a modest objective; yet it failed to accomplish even that small object. It was an explanation, addressed to a candid world, of what had happened. It was a propaganda overture, addressed primarily to France, which the treaty was meant to follow. But we have seen that the Declaration was not read much, nor studied at all, in France. The Declaration had a loftier destiny ahead of it—but an accidental one, and one still far down the road as men busied themselves with laws and armies in the critical autumn months of 1776.

This gives the mood of the book. Mr. Wills objects to finding great visionary insight in the Declaration of Independence. He thinks this is a distortion of what happened and what the Founding Fathers meant to do. He also seems to think that we would be much better off if we had never adopted the myth of the Declaration as our secular religion.

How is the myth expressed? At the beginning of the book the author declares that Abraham Lincoln was in fact the architect of "the recontracting of our society on the basis of the Declaration as our fundamental charter." This was accomplished in 1863 by the Gettysburg Address. What was wrong with this? Well, the Declaration is vague, non-specific, a "propaganda" document. Yet Lincoln made of it a veritable constitution:

> Lincoln was a great artist of America's romantic period. The popular image of the man—pacing long corridors at night, moody, fearing madness—is Byronic in all but its American setting. And his literary kinship in America is established by the style itself: "The mystic cords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature." That is purest Israfel; Lincoln's is the style of a soberer Edgar Poe, with touches of Emerson. It achieves a democratic-oracular tone.

Nine years earlier, at Peoria, Lincoln had seemed to give America special status among the nations—fabricating, in Mr. Wills' terms, the American Myth:

> Let us re-adopt the Dedaration of Independence, and—with it—the practices and policy which harmonize with it. Let North and South, let all America, let all lovers of liberty everywhere, join in the great and good work. If we do this, we shall not only have saved the Union, but shall have so saved it, as to make and to keep it forever worthy of the saving. We shall have so saved it, that the succeeding millions of free happy people, the world over, shall rise up and call us blessed to the latest generation.

Commenting on a speech given by Lincoln at Springfield, Mr. Wills says:

> Lincoln hints here, as he did elsewhere, at the Civil War as the nation's crucifixion. The country set apart by miraculous birth undergoes its supreme test and achieves—resurrection: "that this nation under God shall have a *new birth* of freedom." The nation must be twice-born, according to the gospel pattern, to become a sign for the nations, a pledge that "government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

The author seems to regard such expressions as verbal incantations:

> Well, now, that is a very nice myth. It flatters us with our special status, our central importance to all men's aspirations. If we tried to live up to its implications, we might all be better human beings. So what's the matter with keeping the myths?
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> Useful falsehoods are dangerous things. We can already tot up some of the things this myth has cost us. To begin with, the cult of the Declaration as our mystical founding document led to a downgrading of the actual charter that gives us our law. . . .
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> There are subtler and more important results of the myth. A belief in our extraordinary birth, outside the processes of time, has led us to think of ourselves as a nation apart, with a special destiny, the hope of all those outside America's shores. . . . Lincoln's was the most profound statement of this belief in a special American fate. His version of it was not pinned to a narrow Puritanism or imperialism, but simply to the Declaration itself. Its power is mythic, not sectarian.

> Lincoln did not join a separate religion to politics, he made his politics religious. And that is why his politics has survived the attack on less totally fused forms of "civil religion."

The claim, or point, here, is that the myth fostered by Lincoln gave support to the Manifest Destiny theme in American political enterprise. We are the people entitled to reform and improve the world! John Kennedy, he suggests, used the idea "to make us willing to throw Communist devils out of Russia, China, Cuba, or Vietnam." The elitism of a unique destiny for America justifies whatever we decide to do—invade Mexico, bomb Hiroshima, or manipulate revolutions in Latin American countries. So Mr. Wills wrote a book to help us to cut ourselves down to size.

But *is* the myth of the Declaration of Independence a "falsehood"? Individual humans certainly have high callings and sometimes live them out heroically. Should corresponding challenges be denied to peoples? Lincoln may have called the Americans to a vision that was beyond them: Should he then have kept silent, or appealed solely to self-interest?

What vision of human excellence is free from risk of betrayal or perversion? Much of Mr. Wills' objection to Lincoln's call to heroic American destiny could be applied to Gandhi, and also to Tolstoy, not to mention Socrates. Such are the questions forced to the front by Garry Wills' book on Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence, making it important to read.

# *COMMENTARY*
## SOMETHING TO DO

WE seem to have two ways of pursuing self-knowledge. One comes naturally—call it the myth-making faculty—the projection onto a godlike race of our insistent dreams. The best humans are heroes, and the best heroes, as in the case of Hercules, become gods.

The other way is by making theories in a scientific manner. Leibniz is a splendid example. The primary fact given in experience is our own awareness. Therefore, Leibniz in effect said, we start with consciousness. And since we are many, not one, there must be countless centers of consciousness. He called these centers Monads. Yet we are also one, united in consciousness, in *being* it. Among the monads there are graded unities; some people, some beings, are more united than others. What unites beings that seem separate? Love unites them—love and thought, or love and thought in collaboration. The clearer our thinking, the better the flow of common sympathies and interaction. To understand differences increases the connections which bring them into relative unity. Differences not understood lead to repulsion, hostility, conflict. The more a monad can reflect in itself of the differences—the universe around it—the greater the harmony of its existence and activity. Self-knowledge is also knowledge of the world.

Another idea that seems to help these reflections along is that human beings are not complete, not finished products. What is more characteristic of humans than the fact that they are always needing or wanting something? Our lives are shaped by the hunger for completion—sometimes called "perfection." We cannot imagine human existence without longing. This may tell us something about ourselves. Love realized is no longer love, but something else. Perfection achieved puts an end to need, to longing, to action. We cannot imagine it. It would be the end of everything. Humans, then, are beings for whom finality is extinction! This would be true for any *being,* it seems. Being is becoming. Probably there is no end to it. Loving is becoming, and thinking is becoming, and probably there is no end to either.

We reach such conclusions by joining thinking with feeling. The feeling supplies the motive and energy of search, and the thinking gives direction. Thinking generates ideas of goals but feeling transcends them, setting new objectives. Self-knowledge, then, would be the capacity to give the right order to the succession of relative goals. And knowing, at the same time, that there can be no end to the process of becoming. The glory of life is in its incompletion, always having something to do. The Promethean urge.

# CHILDREN
## . . . and Ourselves
### THE SELF IDEA

A FINE antidote for rigid thinking is available in a paper by Margaret Rawson, "The Self-Concept and the Cycle of Growth," an Orton Society Reprint (Orson Society, 8415 Bellona Lane, Towson, Md., 21204). If there is any single, over-all determinant of how a person's life develops, it is the self-concept. Humans have a part in this. The idea of the self can be either improved or degraded.

The importance of the conception of self becomes evident when a human asks himself, "Why am I the way I am?" He has then to decide what he can do about it. If, consciously or unconsciously, he happens to be a follower of B. F. Skinner, he will not feel able to do very much. He may decide to visit some academy of conditioning where experts will attempt to reshape him closer to his heart's desire. Others, with another self-idea, will choose to do it for themselves. This was the lifelong mission of Socrates—to inspire and persuade the Greeks to do it themselves. And in order to do it, he maintained, you have to *think.* As Eric Havelock wrote in *Preface to Plato:*

> The Greek ego, in order to achieve that kind of cultural experience which after Plato became possible and then normal must stop identifying itself with a whole series of polymorphic vivid narrative situations. . . . It must stop splitting itself up into an endless series of moods. It must separate itself out and by an effort of sheer will must rally itself to the point where it can say "I am I, an autonomous little universe of my own, able to speak 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 action in itself rather than in imitation of the poetic experience. . . . Such a discovery of self could be only of a thinking self.

What does Eric Havelock mean by "a whole series of polymorphic vivid narrative situations"? He means the Homeric dramas, out of which the Greeks shaped their idea of how a good Greek behaves. He means the state of mind in which a man could say to his friends, "The gods did it, not me! Apollo egged me on," or "Hera played a trick on me. Don't hold me responsible." Nowadays we have other versions of such explanation. "Why did I steal the car? Well, I come from a broken home." And so forth. (See books by William Glasser.)

Socrates wanted his fellow citizens to accept responsibility for their acts. People who accept responsibility will naturally think more about what they do. They will become better to live with—to have as neighbors—good for both others and themselves. This, you could say, is the very essence of education—learning to take on all the responsibility you can carry. It is also the foundation of freedom. No one unable to bear responsibility can be free.

This Platonic doctrine is the basis of all good thinking, but in Plato it is stated at the level of high maturity. What about the young? In her Orton Society reprint, Mrs. Rawson writes about how teachers can help children to shape their ideas—actually, their *feelings*—about themselves. The order of her suggestions and proposals is guided by Erik Erikson's psycho-stages of human development, but the practical wisdom comes from Mrs. Rawson's experience as a teacher.

At first the role of the teacher or parent is non-verbal. From infancy to an early age, the most important thing for the child is to develop and feel trust. Love and care engender trust. An unloved child cannot be normal.

> If this first stage is normally gone through, the child goes on with a sense that things are going to work out, that he has justification for optimism and basic, persistent, life-long hope, that he can generally expect people and events to be not necessarily easy but possible for him to cope with and he, in turn, can *give* to others. In Erikson's words, he feels "I am what I have and give."

The getting-giving polarity is one that lasts throughout life. It is archetypal. The Greek gods were both getters and givers, but the good gods were always givers. Prometheus, the titan, was a giver. Will the child some day be able and inclined to identify himself as a member of the Promethean race?

The next stage, in Erikson's scheme, is the child's time of *doing* and of learning how to do:

> He learns not only to walk, but to move about with skill and assurance, to become, in Erikson's term, autonomous, able to separate himself from others in a way he knows he can manage, to begin to be a self in his own right—"to be his own man." There is a parallel here in learning to talk when, as Vygotsky puts it, "thought becomes verbal," "speech becomes rational," and the child is launched as a human language user.

He still needs help. During this period all sorts of idiosyncrasies may emerge, including special abilities joined with wild extremes. But imaginative flights are not to be discouraged. There is nothing wrong with an eight-year-old girl who declares imperiously to a gathering of adults, "I'm a hobbit, and a Martian, and a human!" Then there was the old Scottish lady who called out severely to her grandson, on the verge of giving up some difficult task, "Ian MacGregor, never forget that *you are a MacGregor!"*

For the child in this stage, both encouragement and balance are needed:

> So he must still have the support of adult protection and firmness to help him know that it is all right for him to go ahead, and that he is not at the mercy of either external forces or his own as yet possibly unmanageable impulses, of which he may be justifiably frightened.
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> I am here reminded of a very overactive and uninhibited somewhat older Johnny I once taught. His father had withdrawn from the battle, and his mother was unable to cope with him, so he generally did as he pleased, often with disastrous results. He felt me as unduly restrictive, at first, when I insisted on going on with the lesson instead of letting him "tell stories." One day I gave him free rein. As he told a rambling tale, full of murder and mayhem, he became more and more frenzied until, in a few minutes, he was almost literally "beside himself," writhing on the floor. I picked him up, held him firmly but lovingly, stood him between my knees facing outward, with my arms tightly around him. He gradually subsided, as a sobbing child will do, and I said, "Was it a good idea, Johnny, that story?" With real relief he almost whispered, "No, it wasn't." Several times, after that, I held him, more or less firmly, as we worked. He never seemed to resent it, but rather to welcome help in controlling frightening inner forces, and he did work at the presented tasks, and he did learn to read. I do not know how deep this went, for I have lost touch with him. It was probably not enough, but is was not destructive, and I think it was within the limits of my "job description," what I could do as a protective nurturing adult to be helpful to him in developing a controlled will.

On the role of the parent or teacher of children between three and six, Mrs. Rawson speaks of "bibliotherapy"—the help books can give:

> Who knows how much of the popularity of the "Little House" series of Laura Ingalls Wilder lies in the readers' needs for just such people as Pa and Ma, and for the example of their children living with them? One does not "point the moral," though it is often wise to talk about the things and people and the events of their lives wherein the "moral" lies buried. . . .
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> Perhaps this is the place to interject a word of caution, which I remember needing when I was first learning about when to give and when not to give insight in verbal terms. Often, perhaps always, undesirable behavior toward oneself or others is a defense against the laying bare of a very tender vulnerability. The individual *needs* these defenses, they are his "Linus blanket" against "the slings and arrows of (what seems to him) outrageous fortune." If he is to be rid of the defenses and the rest of the world is to live tolerably with him, two things are needed. He must, perhaps with our help, grow beyond his need for them before he can let the defenses go, or we can sometimes suggest, privately of course, that he doesn't need to do *that* any more.

Margaret Rawson is author of *Developmental Language Disability* (Johns Hopkins Press), a study of the full recovery of twenty boys who suffered from dyslexia while in school. She wrote the book as an encouragement to parents who have children with dyslexic problems. Copies of a second printing are now available from Educators Publishing Service, Inc., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

# *FRONTIERS*

## Resettling America

THERE are various ways to get at what has already happened to the United States during the twentieth century. Some people deplore moral decay and point to the erosions of war. Others speak of the decline of religion. Technology is given a large share of blame. A strong case can be made for the idea that most of our troubles are traceable to loss of community. Psychiatrists collect evidence of the lack of meaning in people's lives, and educators point to the enervating effects of mechanistic psychology and the blurred and ineffectual sense of identity which results.

Called for, Wendell Berry might say, is a deliberate movement to *resettle* America in the light of what we are able to find out about ourselves and the world. We need to become individuals who value community and its health-giving qualities, and we need communities determined to regain both the moral and the practical authority that, in time, will reduce the power and political importance of states. There is now a great deal of longing in the country for a basic change of this sort, but longing leads to frustration when no avenues of action open up. The morale of the country—and of the individuals who make it up—depends upon finding and developing areas where people can go to work. Fortunately, a number of talented and articulate pioneers are actively blazing trails and setting examples.

Where does one begin? This depends, of course, on the line, level, and sphere of one's life. Some of the new magazines are full of material on what can be done and why it is good to do. One good thing is to increase general understanding of what has happened to us all, usually without our knowing it. One thing that has happened, for example, is that all together we have used up the country—in the way we go at things, we have used it up. There is no longer enough raw material for that kind of life. In his epoch-making book, *The Great Frontier* (1952), Walter Prescott Webb summed up:

> The major premise is that the sudden acquisition of land and other forms of wealth by the people of Europe precipitated a boom on Western civilization, and that the boom lasted as long as the frontier was open, a period of four centuries. [1492-1892.] A corollary of the major premise is that our modern institutions . . . were differentiated and nurtured during a boom, and are therefore adapted to boom conditions. . . . The evidence tends to show that the frontier closed in the period between 1890 and 1910. . . . There would seem to be little doubt that our entry into a new age, which remains to be named, will be accompanied by basic changes in the nature of the institutions which grew up in the earlier one.

Add to this Howard Odum's point that our economists think in terms of the weed-like growth of the "boom" cycle, with all its excitement and immeasurable waste, and add, also, the sudden availability of cheap fossil fuel, just when the frontier was closing, and you get a general sense of why there is so much confusion and pain in the present. Then you go on from there, recognizing what cheap fuel did to agriculture, how it made insanely over-size cities possible, while giving to the military the means of conquering or intimidating the world. At the same time, as a natural part of urbanization—since bankers operate in cities—the market economy came to not merely dominate but *absorb* modern life.

All this needs to change, but change is very difficult. As Karl Polanyi said, it's like rebuilding your house while you are living in it. Yet change is absolutely necessary. In an article in *Rain* for last December, Tom Bender makes the case for changing to self-reliant economics by showing how people are affected by the inexorable mechanisms of the market or exchange (money) economy. We have reached a point where biased economic analysis can no longer hide the ruthless impact of the market psychology on our lives. It comes over you when you want to buy a home, but can't afford it. It comes over you while driving home from work on a congested freeway where cars move—when they move—at ten miles

an hour. And when so much money is needed just for rent and food that buying clothes for the children is a serious problem. In a society ruled by the market psychology, you *can't* economize except in very small ways. In a market society, *everything* costs money, and the prices keep going up.

Tom Bender's analysis shows how even such oppressive conditions, when quantitatively measured in dollars, are identified as economic *progress.* This makes him say that "both intentionally and unintentionally we are misled as to the effects of our present economic system." He continues:

> Better accounting concepts can improve our situation considerably, but it seems in case after case that decrease in scale, regaining local control, or internalizing the split between producer and consumer are the inherent structural changes that eliminate or avoid the problems rather than trying to mitigate their effects. . . . as the real costs of centralized exchange economies are becoming clearer, we are discovering the historically better fit of decentralized, locally controlled economies. . . .
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> In none of these cases does self-reliance at any particular level mean slamming the door and cutting off from the rest of the world. What it does mean is tipping the balances and shifting the percentages of what we take responsibility for ourselves at each level vs. what we leave to "someone else."

It is this formation of the *habit* of responsibility that will count, in the long run. There is a contagion in the acceptance of responsibility, related to what we speak of as the dignity of man. Tom Bender concludes:

> I'm interested in demonstrating for a particular area (Oregon) the comparative merits of these ideas [locally made products and local services and energy sources]—laying out new assumptions, social, economic and environmental impacts of a 50 per cent and a 100 per cent shift toward self-reliance, and laying out a framework for institutional and technological changes to accomplish it. We want to examine our "economics" through three major cuts: Household Expenditures (food, shelter, transportation, clothing . . . ), Public Services (health, education, utilities, government . . .), and Major Industries (timber, agriculture, tourism, banking . . .) to see their effect on both people individually and the region as a whole.
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> It is likely that the real issues in economics revolve around scale and institutionalization, the effects upon people and the goals served—not around questions of free enterprise vs. socialism, profit-maximization, or industrial growth. And there's reason to believe we're at a time when major change is possible in these patterns.

This seems about what is meant by resettling America.