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A NOT YET SETTLED CONTROVERSY

IT may be true that no one—no one we know anything about—has the final word about the meaning of life, the working of natural law, and human progress, but it may also be true that some people know more about these matters than others. Curiously, while the importance of this question can hardly be measured, proposing serious answers has proved unpopular.-Why are we so reluctant to admit—openly—that the human species is probably made up of a few wise individuals, a lot of ordinary persons, and some fools?

While the real reason doubtless goes deeper, it is convenient to blame this dislike of hierarchy in human intelligence on the eighteenth century. We have inherited from revolutionary times the slogans we are supposed to live by. We believe in Liberty, *Equality,* and Fraternity. That is, we fought for our liberty in 1776, but didn't get around to sharing it with Black people until about ninety years later. Then, after another ninety years, we tried to do a little better (in 1954). Fraternity has always been difficult for us, except in rather small groups, and a fine scholar, Wilson Carey McWilliams, has written a good book, *The Idea of Fraternity in America* (1973), in an attempt to explain why. But *Equality!* Everyone knows what *that* means. We are all just about the same, some odd, some even, but nonetheless equal or the same.

A long argument could pursue the meaning of Equality but the sense Americans have made of it is clear from two hundred years of practice. No one has improved on John Schaar's summary:

> At the time of the founding, the doctrine and sentiment were already widespread that each individual comes into this world morally complete and self-sufficient, clothed with natural rights which are his by birth, and not in need of fellowship for moral growth and fulfillment. The human material of this new republic consisted of a gathering of men each of whom sought self-sufficiency and the satisfaction of his own desires. Wave after wave of immigrants replenished those urges, for to the immigrant, America largely meant freedom from inherited authorities and freedom to get rich.

The vulgar or political meaning of Equality, right at the start, entitled every citizen to warn every other citizen, "Don't get in my way! We're all equal and it's not any of your business what I do." Then, after a century or so of acquisitive enterprise, Equality was given another meaning. People began to say: "We're not equal any more, the way we used to be." They billed the Republic for the things needed to make them equal, and the Republic paid and paid, or tried to, going deeply into debt.

Scholars did what they could to clear up the ambiguities in Equality, but once an idea or a goal has been politicalized, discussion of ambiguities becomes either impossible or ineffectual. For a politician's purposes, any sort of intellectual clarity on matters involving ambiguity and paradox means bewilderment for the electorate. Having only one meaning for a word like Equality brings a worse confusion, of course, but a confusion which may assure victory at the polls.

Education has not been immune to equalitarian simplification. Educational theory in the United States has always had a strongly practical side. The Founding Fathers wanted plenty of science in the curriculum, providing instruction to coming citizens in the practical arts, to make them better able to gain a living and help the country grow. Accordingly, when the Land Grant colleges got going in the last half of the nineteenth century, the administrators, being responsive to the politicians, who were responsive to their constituencies, set out to make sure that American citizens would become really successful

farmers (there were a lot of farmers in those days), which practically everyone understood to mean *rich* farmers. Being equal, they had just as much right to be rich as Eastern bankers and merchants. This claim that education is meant to lead to riches and prosperity proved persuasive, and since the time the politicians began taking it seriously education in the United States has been going down hill.

The truth of the matter, as non-politicians have long been pointing out, is that human beings are both equal and unequal. The truth about equality lies in the fact that there is a quality in human beings—their very essence, perhaps—which is beyond all comparison. Equality is a label borrowed from the language of comparison and made to apply to a reality not subject to comparison. This is the best the idealists of the eighteenth century—perhaps of any century—could do. After all, what language is there that doesn't depend upon comparison? And if you want to say something about human beings, you have to use language that is available. But all the words implying absolute meanings—words like infinity, zero, and equality—are reduced to second-rate meanings when used in discourse about the everyday world. When we say, then, that human beings are both equal and unequal, we mean that they are both measurable and immeasurable in their beinghood. In short, humans are *complex*. And to say that a man is always equal to other men is the same as saying that there is really no limit to what, potentially or in time, he may be able to do. It is wrong, then, to try to set limits on him or predict his accomplishments. That would be a violation of both natural and moral law, which are possibly at root the same thing.

Along about the turn of the century a son was born to a college president—or a future college president—who would devote his life to understanding how and why humans are both equal and unequal, and to finding out what could be done to help them to become, not more equal, but capable, distinguished, or even unique. The son was Robert Maynard Hutchins, and his father, William J. Hutchins, in 1920 became president of Berea College, in Kentucky. As a place of education, Berea was itself pretty unique. The college was founded before the Civil War by determined Abolitionists, one of whom said it was intended to give "an education to all colors, classes cheap and thorough." The war put a stop to its work for a while, but the school started up again and is still going. We don't know how much influence Berea had on Robert Hutchins' ideas about education, but it may have been considerable. At any rate, he never did anything else in his life but work in education. For him that included everything else. He also worked all his life for *democratic* education. His own schooling was as a lawyer and he went from being Dean of Yale University Law School at the age of thirty to become President of the University of Chicago—the youngest college president in history. He also wrote books about education and democracy.

Shortly after the outbreak of World War II, he spoke about "Preparedness" in a Convocation address at the University. He said:

> Now democracy is not merely a good form of government; it is the best. . . . The reasons why democracy is the best form of government are absurdly simple. It is the only form of government that can combine three characteristics: law, equality, and justice. A totalitarian state has none of these, and hence, if it is a state at all, it is the worst of all possible states. . . .
>
> Let us inquire, then, into what is needed if we are to understand clearly and feel deeply the principles on which democracy rests. What is the basis of these principles of law, equality, and justice? In the first place, in order to believe in these principles at all we must believe that there is such a thing as truth and that in these matters we can discover it. . . . We must see that the moral and intellectual powers of men are the powers which make them men and that their end on earth is the fullest development of these powers. This involves the assumption, once again, that there is a difference between good and bad and that man is a rational animal. There is no use talking about moral powers if there is no such thing as morals, and none in

talking about intellectual powers if men do not possess them. . . .

Are we prepared to defend these principles? Of course not. For forty years or more our intellectual leaders have been telling us they are not true. They have been telling us in fact that nothing is true which cannot be subjected to experimental justification. In the whole realm of social thought there can therefore be nothing but opinion. Since there is nothing but opinion, everybody is entitled to his own opinion. There is no difference between good and bad; there is only the difference between expediency and inexpediency. We cannot even talk about good and bad states or good and bad men. There are no morals; there are only the folkways. The test of action is its success, and even success is a matter of opinion. Man is no different from the other animals; human societies are no different from animal societies. The aim of animals and animal societies, if there is one, is subsistence. The aim of human beings and human societies, if there is one, is material comfort. Freedom is simply doing what you please. The only common principle that we are urged to have is that there are no principles at all. . . .

In the great struggle that may lie ahead, truth, justice, and freedom will conquer only if we know what they are and pay them the homage they deserve. This is the kind of preparedness most worth having, a kind without which all other preparation is worthless. This kind of preparedness has escaped us so far.

Why did Hutchins seem so sure about all this? Because he was convinced that some people know better than others how to approach or come close to the answers to great questions. He had become persuaded of this through study of good books. With some help from his friends he put together a list of the Great Books of the Western world and tried with some success to base a university curriculum on them. (He was quite successful in the case of the revived St. John's College at Annapolis.) He explained his position in *The Higher Learning in America:*

I am not here arguing for any specific theological or metaphysical system. I am insisting that consciously or unconsciously we are always trying to get one. I suggest that we shall get a better one if we recognize explicitly the need for one and try to get the most rational one we can. We are, as a matter of fact, living today by the haphazard, accidental, shifting threads of a theology and metaphysics to which we cling because we must cling to something. If we can revitalize metaphysics and restore it to its place in the higher learning, we may be able to establish a rational order in the modern world as well as in the universities.

He made his position *quite* plain:

If we omit from theology faith and revelation, we are substantially in the position of the Greeks, who are thus, oddly enough, closer to us than are the Middle Ages. Now Greek thought was unified. It was united by the study of first principles. Plato had a dialectic which was a method of exploring first principles. Aristotle made the knowledge of them into the science of metaphysics. Among the Greeks, then, metaphysics, rather than theology, is the ordering and proportioning discipline. It is in the light of metaphysics that the social sciences, dealing with man and man, take shape and illuminate one another. In metaphysics we are seeking the causes of things that are. It is the highest science, the first science, and as first, universal. . . . The aim of higher education is wisdom. Wisdom is knowledge of principles and causes. Therefore metaphysics is the highest wisdom.

If we can secure a real university in this country and a real program of general education upon which its work can rest, it may be that the character of our civilization may slowly change. It may be that we can outgrow the love of money, that we can get a saner conception of democracy, and we can even understand the purposes of democracy. It may be that we can abandon our false notions of progress and utility and that we can come to prefer intelligible organization to the chaos we mistake for liberty. It is because these things may be that education is important.

These were the themes which occupied Robert Hutchins throughout his life. They made him the target of condescending and sometimes contemptuous criticism. How did *he* know so much? Why are his guesses about which are the great books any better than anyone else's? Anyway, the science of today and tomorrow is more important than books written in the past.

Hutchins had a reply to this:

A classic is a book that is contemporary in every age. That is why it is a classic. The conversations of Socrates raise questions that are as urgent today as

> they were when Plato wrote. In fact they are more so, because the society in which Plato lived did not need to have them raised as much as we do. We have forgotten how important they are.

There is a curious parallel between the careers of Robert M. Hutchins and Arthur E. Morgan—both distinguished educators although men with different ideas. Morgan resuscitated Antioch College, starting in 1920, and after giving it about fourteen years of his life accepted the post of head of TVA. Then, when that ordeal reached its conclusion, he went back to Yellow Springs, Ohio, and organized Community Service, Inc., a modest foundation devoted to fostering the processes of intentional community life. The small community, he said, is the seed-bed of society. By the time the young get to college, he said, the twig is bent. Formation of character begins earlier. It takes place in community and the home.

Hutchins may have experienced a similar disenchantment. He left the University of Chicago early in the 1950s to become co-director with Paul Hoffman of the Ford Foundation. Then, because he wanted to have closer touch with the work of establishing an intellectual community, he organized the Fund for the Republic, which later became the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions (in Santa Barbara, Calif.), and cut his ties with the Ford Foundation. After some years in this activity he explained what the Center was trying to do:

> By an intellectual community I mean an organization devoted to thinking, and to thinking together. I do not mean one that is "intellectualist," or whose members regard themselves as "intellectuals" or as residents in a tower of ivory or other impermeable material.
>
> An intellectual community is hard to find—and hard to found. There are a great many thinking people: universities contain a large number who try to do nothing else. But this is an age of specialization, and nobody would pretend that men in universities have much opportunity to think together. It is sometimes said that such collaborative activity is no longer possible.

The Center was a place where Hutchins hoped to show how it could be done. But there were problems. A close associate and co-worker at the Center once said to a visitor: "Bob thinks he has a Platonic Academy going here." The visitor commented that Plato's school was gnostic in its assumptions, while the temper at the Center was agnostic. "That," the Center man mused, "may account for the ragtag and bobtail character of our proceedings." It was very difficult, and would perhaps have been precocious, to get agreement on first principles among a group of intellectuals during the middle years of the twentieth century. Hutchins explained what they attempted:

> The Center is trying to get things clear so that a reasonable argument can be conducted. The Center does not take positions: it seeks to promote understanding by indicating responsible positions that can be taken and to suggest what the consequences may be.

A more fundamental problem probably lay in the fact that not all the collaborators at the Center seemed to have the same purpose and commitment that Hutchins had. The ones that did often became impatient with all the talk. Hutchins made this apology: "The truth about the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions is that it is not a very good center, but it is the only one there is." The idea was to try. As he explained:

> My point is that unless a society can develop and maintain intellectual communities devoted to understanding and wisdom, unless it has centers of independent thought and criticism, it is bound to make some sad mistakes. A country with great knowledge factories, but without independent thought, systematic criticism, understanding, and wisdom, may be the richest and most powerful, but it will also be the most dangerous in the world. Or it will disintegrate, .for justice is the cement that holds a political community together.

A lot has been written to point out the flaws and failures of the Center. Not enough has been written about the man—the kind of man—who got it going. You can of course find things wrong with Hutchins and what he did. But an educational project is not a solo undertaking.

Hutchins spent much of his time redressing balances. He said little about learning how to make a living because in America making a living had come to mean getting rich. Getting an education, Hutchins maintained, has nothing to do with getting rich.

The point of thinking about the careers of such men as Robert Hutchins is to try to understand why they, in striking contrast to so many others, decide to devote their lives to finding out how liberty, equality, and fraternity might be established in the world, or how to perfect a government which combines the three characteristics of law equality, and justice. We are speaking, of course, of individuals who take these ideals seriously and work for them by day and dream about them at night. They keep on attempting to do things that seem almost impossible to do. How are efforts like that to be evaluated?

Take for example a reform Hutchins suggested at the University of Chicago:

> I propose that, in order to clarify our objectives, we immediately discard medieval notions about Authority. I should like to hire men to instruct our students who can truly demonstrate a capacity to stimulate thought, and I should like to discard the notion that the men who have written the most books or possess the most degrees are the best teachers. I propose also that we should forget rank among ourselves, and, even in the matter of salary, pay men according to their needs rather than according to their seniority or academic reputations.

Robert Hutchins accomplished one practically impossible thing in his life. He was a gadfly who became head man, a philosopher who actually got to be king—well, king of a sort. He paid a high price for achieving this contradiction. He was a Roman who succeeded in becoming an Athenian, and, a little like Cicero, lost fair-weather friends in the process. He believed that some people know better than others, and that the only way to find out who they are is by dialogue. This was his idea of democratic education. It may be long before we see his like again.

REVIEW
OUR TOWN

BACK in the old days, the early 1950s, poets like Kenneth Patchen and Lawrence Ferlinghetti were reciting their verses against a jazz background, and they made a record or two. Some of what they did was very good—Patchen's "I Came to a City," and Ferlinghetti's poem about a little dog strolling down the street. A fellow interested in elevating the tone of our cultural life attended some of the poetry-and-jazz concerts and decided that the themes weren't upward-and-onward enough. "Why don't they do Walt Whitman?" he asked. He thought Whitman might go quite well with some parts of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.

But when he tried reading Whitman out loud, without Gershwin, he couldn't bear listening to himself. It wouldn't work at all, he decided. Even Whitman, he thought, couldn't stand it if he tried it today. The qualities Whitman lived by seem to have gone out of our lives, and his insurgent lines are now harder to believe in than the romances of Tolkien. Maybe Sidney Poitier could do a little Whitman—he did so well with Plato against a musical background—but probably no one else.

Why can't we do Whitman any more? We can enjoy reading him, but not out loud. We don't have the art for it. The practice of the arts may be lonely, but it requires an audience with some riches to lend the performer. In this case, however, the artist knows that there's no one out there who could read from Whitman without sudden embarrassment, and since this is also true of himself, it doesn't work.

It's not such a long way from this question to the fiction writing of Joyce Carol Oates and Joan Didion. The essays of these extraordinary women are about the best non-fiction reading you can find nowadays. But their novels mainly depress. We haven't been able to finish any one of them. Is this because, like the young man who wanted to recite Whitman, they can't write any other kind of story? Is it a matter of artistic integrity?

Artistry is richly present in their work. But the people in the stories don't seem to have any real insides. They are mostly unlovable. You don't have to be a sentimental optimist to write about lovable people, or even somewhat likable people. You just have to be able to locate some hidden promise in them. But this is what no modern artist seems able to attempt. It wouldn't ring true.

To write with hope and encouragement for a sophisticated modern audience requires examples which have some cultural visibility in the world. Art needs a supporting culture, not just an audience. So the artist is reduced to revealing the vacuums in people, and good artists won't invent qualities that don't seem to be there. This candor accounted for the success of the Theatre of the Absurd, which held up an abstracting or exaggerating mirror to contemporary life. It was all quite deliberate—"Say it isn't so!" was the invitation to the audiences, as Adamov once explained. The same hope for rejection may be behind some of present-day fiction.

The contemporary writer isn't at all sure about the insides of people—how much, if anything is there—so he tells about their periphery, the way they talk. What they do is only the working out of some kind of doom. Here is a passage from Joan Didion's *A Book of Common Prayer* which tells how people get rid of unwanted guests:

> A familiar drift would emerge. Not only toilets but guestroom telephones would go out of order. Men would arrive to drain the swimming pool. Suggestions would be made for traveling before the rain set in, or the heat, or the projected work on the Interstate. Reminders would be made about promises to visit Charlie Ferris in Oxford, or Miss Anne Clary on the Gulf. . . .
>
> After Charlotte went to bed there would be silence for a few hours and then more raised voices, Warren's among them, and Charlotte would bury her head in one pillow and put another over her belly so

the baby could not hear and the next day she and Warren would move to a motel.

"I don't like these people," she said to Warren after one such evening. "I don't like them and I don't want to be beholden to them."

"Your not beholden to anybody. You're too used to Arabs and Jews, you don't know how normal people behave."

"I can't help noticing Arabs and Jews are rather less insulting to their houseguests."

"Not to this houseguest they wouldn't be, babe." In the wreckage of these visits Warren seemed unfailingly cheerful. "You show me an Arab who'll put up with me, I'll show you an Arab who doesn't get the picture."

In all those motels he wanted the curtains shut in the daytime.

You make up your own idea of the characters in the story from passages like that. Little by little, from what they say, they are supposed to give themselves away. There aren't any other clues.

Still, there are ways to tell something about the insides of people. In a book published in 1960, Anthony West describes a scene in a Florida city:

Two Negro girls came down the street, daring any white man to look at them. Their dresses were stretched like skin over their young bodies, and their firm breasts seemed to vibrate as their stiletto-heeled shoes tapped the pavement. There were golden clips like small seashells on the lobes of their ears and their formal mouths were drawn on their lips in a very pale magenta. Gavin looked deeply into the eyes of the girl nearest him and saw the softness and sweetness behind the sullenly aggressive face's challenge to him to deny It was a human face. There was always a person within, and still another within that inner being. There was the outer shell contrived to take the wounds, the inner, wounded creature, and inside, or beyond that, the matrix, the lost twin, unhurt, unspoiled, and uncorrupt.

Well, this is fairly easy to do with words, and Joan Didion undertakes the much more difficult task of letting the reader draw such conclusions as deductions . . . if there are any to be drawn.

Sometimes the writer helps the reader by making the inferences part of the story. In *The Inhabitants*, Julius Horwitz tells about something that happened in a New York office where people come to get on relief:

Just as I crossed the middle of the room a Negro girl stood up and screamed. I saw her screaming at the interview desk of Mrs. Nivens. She turned toward the wooden benches to scream. The people on the benches stared dumbly at her wide-open mouth. Mrs. Nivens sat quietly at her desk waiting for the girl to stop screaming. In an instant the girl did stop screaming.

"Why did she scream?" Miss Flekher asked me.

"Probably because Mrs. Nivens asked her a question that she couldn't give an honest answer to."

"Do people often scream here like that?"

"Some do it loudly, most do it quietly. But everybody screams."

Screaming, you could say, is for primitive people who believe in the magic of desperate outcry. When all else fails, you tell the universe you need help. Joan Didion's characters are too sophisticated to scream, they don't believe in any kind of magic, and the universe never did make any sense to them. And when they hurt they know ways of becoming numb. Yet the whole of Miss Didion's book is one long scream—sub- or ultrasonic.

Another way of telling about the insides of people is by showing what they see when they go out in the street. Anthony West does this in his novel (*The Trend Is Up*) when the leading character drives through his Florida home town:

Gavin looked at the strings of fluorescent pennants, the signs that twirled in the wind like prayer wheels, the balloons painted with slogans, and the tawdry canvas banners and wondered. In the middle of it all he ran into a traffic jam. It had piled up where two huge army-surplus searchlights were being maneuvered into position in the entry of a newly finished steam bakery which was to have its gala opening that night. The searchlights were eased up ramps past signs showing the usual cute freckled and pigtailed child with enormous eyes saying, "Oooh Mommy, Meltene," as she clasped an immense

> honey-colored loaf to her chest. As the jam began to melt and pour down the Avenue Gavin saw another sign at the corner of the block. "You'll feel better if you go to Church next Sunday—the makers of Meltene Bread, your new neighbors, have donated this space to the United Faiths Attendance Drive as a community service." Gavin drove on downtown asking himself who, if anyone, the makers of Meltene thought they were fooling, who was supposed to believe in Schulman's generosity, or in Martinez as a character who would put equity before profit? It struck him with renewed force as he approached the young city's center how much of what was supposed to be new, bright, and gay that its traders were offering to its inhabitants was in fact tawdry and fraudulent, and how many of the offers of finer, better, easier, sweeter, things were simply lies. The drive from the airport to his bank building was a forty-minute study period in a course in cynicism and disbelief. At the lights, he watched the milling streams of people on the sidewalks and in the safety lanes, looking at their faces, and asking himself with amazement how, so abused as they were, they could retain any faith or trust in their society or even in human decency itself.

And that, no doubt, is a part of the explanation of why no one feels able to read Walt Whitman out loud.

COMMENTARY
CONCEPTION AND GESTATION

WHILE the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions did not blossom into being in Santa Barbara until 1959, the conceptions and purposes it represented were much in the minds of Robert Hutchins and his close associate, W. H. Ferry, five years before, during the early days of the Fund for the Republic. This thinking was not unknown to others of like concern and inclination, as a letter, dated Jan. 29, 1954, addressed to Hutchins at the Ford Foundation in Pasadena, shows:

> Dear Dr. Hutchins:
>
> My brave and very esteemed colleague, Dr. H. H. Wilson, has written you a letter which resulted from a conversation between us. As it is always in such matters, we did not fully understand each other's beliefs, the general tendency being, of course, common to both of us.
>
> The opinion we both share is that even people of clear judgement, strong character and recognized achievements see, under the present circumstances, no possibility for reasonable action and are discouraged by a lack of resonance in their respective environments. The difficult question is: What should be done? In this respect there seems to be a slight difference in Dr. Wilson's and my opinions. He seems to think of a loose organization where everybody can become a member. *To me it seems rather preferable to bring together some persons of recognized merits who have shown in their past devotion to the cause of intellectual and political freedom and tolerance. This would be a small body according to the scheme of the continental Academies, the new members of which are chosen by the old ones.*
>
> Both procedures have their merits and their weaknesses. In the long run every such creation seems doomed to degeneration. But this one [its degeneration?] is not needed for a very long time—so we may hope. I know that you have incomparably more experience and judgment in such matters than both of us and we will be very grateful for everything you suggest.
>
> With kind regards,
>
> Sincerely yours,
> A. Einstein

We don't know what Dr. Hutchins said in reply to Dr. Einstein (who died in 1955), but what he thought needed to be done became plain from the gradual alteration of the policies of the Fund for the Republic. The Fund became functionally the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions years before the name was changed. In 1957 the Fund began sponsoring studies (called Basic Issues) of the problems of civil liberties and civil rights in the United States, and a year later decided to continue this research, but with greater penetration. Changes in American institutions since the founding of the Republic made it necessary, Hutchins said, to *redefine* the issues behind these problems. This work inaugurated a cycle of publication of reports which gave the Center the eminence it deserved.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
REASONS FOR READING AND SCHOOLING

WE haven't read *The Childbirth Book* by Christine Beels (published in England by Turnstone, 1978, at £2.50), but the review by June Miller in *Resurgence* (July and August) seems more knowledgeable than anything we could turn out. It begins:

> This is a very good book for anyone expecting a first child and even those who have had one or two will, I am sure, find lots to interest them in it. . . . The book is very simply and pleasingly written, no technical jargon remains unexplained. Quotations from mothers and fathers are used throughout and emphasize how different births and labour can be. The illustrations are fresh and clear so that you can know what the doctor is feeling for in those interminable checkups on how the baby is lying. There are plenty of references to other sources of information, books, magazines and organizations which can tell you more.

The reviewer writes out of personal interest and experience:

> Birth is, I believe, an experience where preparation and knowledge are well repaid. Of course in some societies pregnant women help deliver a child so that they know how a birth can be. Few of us have this opportunity—the book does tell you of films for hire—so books are needed to supplement the experiences we hear from our friends. How can we cope with the pain? And if we take a particular drug what effect will it have? We must be prepared beforehand. In my experience of hospital the staff had no time to explain anything. In fact the drug Pethedine was administered against my will, so be prepared.
>
> Mothers who want to have their babies at home will be encouraged to know that this is standard practice in Holland, which is third in the world in low maternal mortality tables. Having just given birth to my second child at home with the midwife delivering and the cooperative local doctor stitching me up afterwards, I certainly support the book's bias to home births. I feel tight in the chest every time I hear of a hospital famous for inductions, where births occur on Tuesdays so that medical staff can have a free weekend. So beware of going for your checkup on Monday, only to be kept there for an induction the next day. Just recently I met a mother who during her induced birth felt as though the top of her head had been sliced off and was floating a few feet away. All instructions went first to her floating brain and thence to her body. She had no sensation of birth at all, but she now knows what a "trip" is. . . .
>
> It is clear that we must give up the comforting notion that "doctor knows best" or "nurse knows best." We can no longer allow others to assume the responsibility for our bodies and our child.

This review is titled, "Birth Is not an Illness."

We lately came into possession of a Dell paperback—*Up From Slavery* by Booker T. Washington—in its way all about education. The introduction is by Louis Lomax, who both admires Washington and strongly disagrees with him, which in this case makes for a very good introduction. He says (said in 1965):

> Few, I fear, have read this book which is unquestionably an American classic. Furthermore, the freedom fighters, Negro and white, who are so nobly pressing the cause of racial justice today, have failed to pause and think through Booker T. Washington, whose impact upon the destiny of the American Negro is unmatched, save by, perhaps, Abraham Lincoln. In a very real sense, Booker T. Washington made us. This book, more than any other single piece of American writing, is responsible for what we are, for what we are not. We who are like Booker Washington are that way because we agree with him; we who are unlike him are that way because we disagree with him. But we all, in a basic sense, are what we are because he was *there*, because he did what he did and said what he said.

What was so wrong with Booker T. Washington, who founded Tuskegee Institute for the education of Black people, and kept it going? Lomax explains:

> Behind Washington's philosophy of Negro education was his deep desire—and determination—to please white people. He said Negroes should learn to use their hands, but what he really meant was that white people objected to and would not support a school where Negroes were taught to be other than sophisticated menials. The classic evidence of this comes from the late E. Franklin Frazier, an eminent sociologist, who taught at Tuskegee in his early years.

> Frazier says he was reprimanded by Washington for walking across the Tuskegee campus with books under his arm. "After all," Frazier has Washington saying, "we don't want our white friends to feel we are teaching our students to think!"

In justification, perhaps, you could say that Washington was boring from within, and that the white people had the money he needed to keep Tuskegee going. Lomax asks what might have happened if Washington had spoken out against job and voting discrimination:

> Would Washington have been chased from the South as DuBois was? And had he been chased from that troubled land would he have developed the series of Negro schools that sprouted from the Tuskegee idea and then did an ideological flip-flop to train the men who now lead the Negro revolt?

Washington, born a slave in 1858 or 1859, knew the pains of illiteracy. He taught himself the alphabet from a discarded spelling book and after the Civil War struggled heroically to acquire an elementary education that would fit him for Hampton Institute, a school begun by a Northern general for the education of Blacks. Perhaps he was called Booker because of his love of books. He doesn't say, but his gratitude and loyalty to anyone who helped him along the path to schooling are plain from the beginning.

He became especially devoted to a white woman who trained him as a housecleaner. The value of this "background" became evident when he finally arrived at Hampton, which was hundreds of miles from where he lived and worked. He was hungry, dirty, and tired. In presenting himself to the head teacher, he said, "I felt that I could hardly blame her if she got the idea that I was a worthless loafer or tramp."

> After some hours had passed, the head teacher said to me: "The adjoining recitation-room needs sweeping. Take the broom and sweep it." It occurred to me at once that here was my chance. Never did I receive an order with more delight. I knew that I could sweep, for Mrs. Ruffner had thoroughly taught me how to do that when I lived with her.
>
> I swept the recitation room three times. Then I got a dusting-cloth and I dusted four times. All the woodwork around the walls, every bench, table, and desk, I went over four times with my dusting-cloth. Besides, every piece of furniture had been moved and every closet and corner in the room had been thoroughly cleaned. I had the feeling that in large measure my future depended upon the impression I made upon the teacher in the cleaning of that room. When I was through, I reported to the head teacher. She was a "Yankee" woman who knew just where to look for dirt. She went into the room and inspected the floor and closets, then she took her handkerchief and rubbed it on the woodwork about the walls, and over the table and benches. When she was unable to find one bit of dirt on the floor, or a particle of dust on any of the furniture, she quietly remarked, "I guess you will do to enter this institution."

Washington finished this story by saying that while he took other examinations later, "I have always felt that this was the best one I ever passed." He was one of the youngest students at Hampton. Most were grown men and women, some as old as forty. They were all poor, many with people dependent on them. "The great and prevailing idea that seemed to take possession of every one was to prepare himself to lift up the people at home." Reading about Booker T. Washington makes you wonder what other ways there are—besides racial persecution followed by a Civil War—to generate such motives for going to school.

FRONTIERS

How Do They Fool Us? Let Us Count The Ways

THE *New Ecologist* for May/June presents "Nutrition by Numbers," an article by Ross Hume Hall (reprinted from *En-Trophy,* issued by the Institute for Advanced Study in Hamilton, Ontario), in which the writer details the folly of supposing that the figures given on the labels of packaged foods have much to do with their nutritional value. The figures, of course, are required by law. A listing of the ingredients of a prepared food is supposed to inform the buyer that it is safe to eat and why it may be good for him. This is "consumer protection," enforced by agencies charged with public service in behalf of the general welfare. As Mr. Hall says:

> During the 1950s and 60s all the food regulatory agencies of Western countries believed their major function was to prevent undeclared adulteration and to stop the food industry from poisoning consumers. They showed little interest in nutrition and only in the last few years, simultaneously with the public's awakened awareness, have they begun to declare their support for *nutritious, wholesome food.*

How do you find out if you are eating wholesome, nutritious food? Well, you keep track of how you feel after you have eaten it. But people, it is truthfully said, can be fooled. Feelings may mislead. Accordingly, an outside authority, relying on impersonal, disinterested, scientific knowledge, must pass on all claims about food. Hence the information on the labels, verified in some way or other by government agencies. This is the most, one could argue, that government can be expected to do.

It probably is. Why do we now especially need the authority of government? Because, as a commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration said in 1975:

> Forty per cent of all meals now eaten by Americans whether consumed in restaurants, fast food service stations, or at home, have been prepared outside the home; and the percentage is rapidly increasing. Assuming this trend continues, we predict that in ten years, *70 per cent* of all meals will be eaten away from home or brought home ready to eat. . . .

So the need for reliable numbers—bottom-line numbers, or some kind of endorsement of quality—is obvious enough. Taste is a notoriously deceptive guide and the "look" of a product may be even more deceiving. So we get numbers. What do they tell us?

The reliance on numbers by scientists goes back to Galileo. If you can't measure it, he said, don't bother with it. If you can't count it, it doesn't count. Well, that works pretty well for engineers, who work in an area where counting is of the essence. But how about food? Ross Hume Hall writes about what is left out by numbers applied to the ingredients of food. Explaining why numbers seem important, he says:

> Lord Kelvin, the eminent nineteenth-century British physicist, once remarked that it wasn't science unless it could be measured. His comment tended to dismiss a large part of biological science as non-science, a slight that biologists have been trying to rectify ever since, by putting their sciences on a mathematical basis.

And not only biologists, we might add. Even the social sciences try very hard to be numerical. Descartes didn't think history had much importance because its processes—to say nothing of its values—resisted quantification. So we count when we can, and even when we can't, and let other things go. Consider, for example, the megaton thinkers who equate security with countable armament. How many divisions has the Pope? was Stalin's bottom-line question.

Education is measured by dollars spent and tests passed or failed by children. Prosperity is measured by the Gross National Product. Health is supposed to be delivered to the public in finite quantities measured mostly by dollars, although mortality tables and the incidence of infectious and degenerative diseases also come into the picture.

What do all these numbers leave out? Well, we know pretty well what they leave out but we don't know what to do about it. Even the people who are trying to bring about reforms have to use numbers in another way. If you want to know, for example, what has been "organically grown," people with experience in these things say that the best evidence is a soil analysis. That means numbers. Soil ingredients are measurable, while testing for nutritive potentials is difficult, expensive, and arguable. It is arguable because of the reality described by Mr. Hall:

> Nourishment is a very complex biological phenomenon in which one life form gives up its life and is converted into another life form. People eat food that at one time was either a living plant or animal and all its biological complexities resident in that living (ex-) flesh are transformed into the unique complexities of the human consumer. Science has not had much success in defining precisely the nature of this phenomenon and except for an understanding of the principles, the details remain hazy. How then can we go about assigning numbers to something as nebulous as nourishment and should we even try? Might as well try to measure precisely the dimensions of a cumulus cloud.

That is the situation, yet, as this writer goes on to show, nutrition scientists, "having identified fats, carbohydrates, proteins, sixteen vitamins, seventeen minerals, nine essential amino acids, concluded that this was about all that one needed to know." Then, in 1943, the Food and Nutrition Board in Washington decided upon and published "the recommended dietary allowances (RDA) for some of the known dietary essentials of people of different ages." Subsequently, seven revisions have been made, the latest being the 1974 list. In short, there now exists in numbers as a dietary standard "a statement of the daily amounts of energy and essential nutrients considered adequate, on the basis of scientific data, to meet the physiological needs of practically all healthy persons in a population."

Well, the information no doubt has value. It has certainly been valuable to the fritter company which "added six Roche vitamins, and hit the jackpot when their super donuts were approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for use in the school meal programme." Two super donuts and an eight oz. glass of milk, according to the USDA nutritionists, officially supplied one third of the child's nourishment for the day.

A fact of incidental interest is that researchers have compiled the RDAs for rats as well as humans, and for a number of items (such as zinc, magnesium, calcium, pantothenic acid, bioflavin, and several vitamins) the official values are "from three to ten times greater than those for humans." Why should that be?

What shall we do about all these numbers, which anon save and anon damn? How much, one wonders, did the five population groups adjudged by Eve Balfour to be the healthiest people in the world know about all these vital measurements? We, of course, being civilized and advanced, need to have real reasons for what we do, but are the numbers we rely upon much help in this direction? Is there some other sort of arithmetic we should be studying?