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MISSING IN MODERNISM

A CURIOUS part of being "modern" is the manifest distaste for what our distant ancestors spoke of as Virtue—the Greeks called it *areté*—and which they held to be the fundamental objective of human life. But for us, talk of virtue stultifies conversation, as though the subject were slightly indecent and not merely boring. *Why?* The answer seems easy enough. We find it difficult to separate goodness from moral ostentation, and a paraded virtue comes close to being deeply offensive to the intuitive taste of intelligent humans. We tend to like people who feel embarrassed when charged with being "virtuous," and who deliberately conceal the qualities that are likely to bring such comment. to one seeks companionship with the morally pretentious man, and while there are those who, when pressed, will admit to humanitarian motives, the idea of "goodness" is avoided as though it were some kind of puritan infection.

One way of understanding this almost universal attitude is by regarding the Renaissance as a gradual freeing of Western man from institutionally defined goals and ideals. The liberation began with Galileo's rejection of what is said in scholastic treatises concerning the physical world. "Methinks," he said, "that in the discussion of natural problems, we ought not to begin at the authority of places of scripture, but at sensible experiments and necessary demonstrations." It took only a little more than a hundred years for this outlook to become the convention of the *philosophes* who set the intellectual and moral stage for the French Revolution. These planners of a brave new world, as Carl Becker says in *The Heavenly City*, "renounced the authority of church and Bible, but exhibited a naive faith in the authority of nature and reason." Discovery, industry, and scientific inquiry after the pattern established by Galileo gave the nineteenth century its unbounded self-confidence and moral complacency, and while conventional religion continued to enjoy lip-service, the scientific thinkers thoroughly undermined the foundations of any familiar sort of religious faith. Again as Becker puts it:

> What is man that the electron should be mindful of him! Man is but a foundling in the cosmos, abandoned by the forces that created him. Unparented, unassisted and undirected by omniscience or benevolent authority, he must fend for himself, and with the aid of his own limited intelligence find his way about in an indifferent universe.
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> Such is the world pattern that determines the character and direction of modern thinking.

Yet during this time of shaping the prevailing part of the modern mind into the rigid orthodoxy of scientism there were individuals who resisted its denial of human potentiality. They remained suspicious of *any* sort of orthodoxy and took Galileo's directive as a mandate to search their own hearts as ardently as the physicists were pursuing the secrets of nature. In the arts and literature "modernism" has meant a determined break with the past and a very nearly heroic independence of mind. As Ellmann and Feidelson, editcrs of *The Modern Tradition*, say in their Preface:

> Modernism strongly implies some sort of historical discontinuity, either a liberation from inherited patterns or, at another extreme, deprivation and disinheritance. In an essay on "The Modern Element in Modern Literature," Lionel Trilling singles out a radically anti-cultural bias as the most important attribute of the modern imagination. Committed to everything in human experience that militates against custom, abstract order, and even reason itself, modern literature has elevated individual existence over social man, unconscious feeling over self-conscious perception, passion and will over intellection and systematic morals, dynamic vision over the static image, dense actuality over

> practical reality. In these and other ways it has made the most of its break with the past, its inborn challenge to established culture. Concurrently, it has been what Henry James called an "imagination of disaster." Interwoven with the access of knowledge, the experimental verve, and the personal urgency of the modern masters is, as Trilling also finds, a sense of loss, alienation, and despair. These are the two faces, positive and negative, of the modern as the anti-traditional freedom and deprivation, a living present and a dead past.

Is it possible to enjoy freedom and not suffer deprivation? Only, it seems, for the few. Even the modest rituals of the Unitarian Church were too confining, too artificial, for Emerson, but his disciplined imagination, while set free, brought him no sense of impending disaster. For Emerson, to be in the world was to feel himself diffused through time and space. He said: "I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God." At more or less the same time (in 1851) the tough-minded Herman Melville wrote to Hawthorne to ridicule Goethe's *"Live in the all,"* saying:

> Here is a fellow with a raging toothache. "My dear boy," Goethe says to him, "you are sorely afflicted with that tooth; but you must *live in the all*, and then you will be happy!" As with all great genius, there is an immense deal of flummery in Goethe, and in proportion to my own contact with him, a monstrous deal of it in me.

But in a postscript he added:

> N.B. This "all" feeling, though, there is some truth in. You must often have felt it, lying on the grass on a warm summer's day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. Your hair feels like leaves upon your head. This is the *all* feeling. But what plays the mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion.

Such are the problems in finding a natural religion, or making one out of personal experience. There are golden moments but also terrible contradictions. A century after Melville wrote to Hawthorne, another American writer. Henry Miller, set down his reflections while living in Big Sur (California):

> Only when we are truly alone does the fullness and richness of life reveal itself to us. In simplifying our lives, everything acquires a significance hitherto unknown. When we are one with ourselves the most insignificant blade of grass assumes its proper place in the universe. Or a piece of manure, for that matter. Properly attuned, it's all one come Christmas, as we say. One thing becomes just as important as another, one person as good as another. Lowest and highest become interchangeable. The own precious self gets swallowed up in the ocean of being. It is then that the carrion bird no longer seems hideous, nor merely to be tolerated because of his scavenger propensities. Nor do the stones in the field then seem inanimate, or to be regarded with an eye toward future walls and buttresses. Even if it last only a few moments, the privilege of looking at the world as a spectacle of unending life and not as a repository of persons, creatures and objects to be impressed into our service, is something never to be forgotten. The ideal community, in a sense, would be the loose, fluid aggregation of individuals who elected to be alone and detached in order to be at one with themselves and all that lives and breathes. It would be a God-filled community, even if none of its members believed in (a) God. It would be a paradise, even though the word had long disappeared from our vocabulary.
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> In all the cities and countries I dream of visiting one day there are, of course, no such communities. Even in the holiest places man is prone to act the fool, the bigot, the idolater. As I said before, today we find only individuals dedicated to "the good life." Nevertheless, these isolated individuals are bringing about a community which will one day replace the dismembered warring communities which are a disgrace to the name. The world does tend to become one, however much its component elements resist. Indeed, the stronger the resistance the more certain is the outcome. We resist only what is inevitable.

As a natural religion, this may have served the individual Henry Miller well—as flashes of insight in other of his books suggest—but its provocations are not strong enough for most others. Can there be, one wonders, a religion wholly without conventions, or even conventional beliefs? Is there a credo that humans could adopt

without undue persuasion or constraint? One hopes so.

One line of inquiry practiced in the Renaissance, along with the rise of science, was a search for the wisdom of the past. They looked mainly to the Greeks, but one or two explorers turned to the East, if Islamic wisdom can be called Eastern. Is there indeed a Lost Word?

One hardly expects this idea to be taken seriously, except for an occasional sect of mystics or poets who respond to an inborn nostalgia, yet there is a passage in Giorgio De Santillana's *Hamlet's Mill* which comes close to its adoption. Since De Santillana teaches the history of science at M.I.T., and is a scholar of extraordinary erudition, one has sufficient reason to take him seriously. In this book he speaks of a "great world-wide archaic construction" already in existence when the Greeks came on the scene, of which something survives in myths and fairy tales which are hardly understood. The original themes, he suggests, were preserved in the thought of the Pythagoreans and Plato, as "tantalizing fragments of a lost whole." Plato, De Santillana declares, could speak "the language of archaic myth" and built the first modern philosophy on this foundation. Plato, we may remark, took the ideas of the Mystery Schools, then in decline, and made them into his Dialogues, using the language of Reason (the *Nous*), supplemented by myths of his own devising As De Santillana says:

> Behind Plato there stands the imposing body of doctrine attributed to Pythagoras, some of its formulation uncouth, but rich with the prodigious content of early mathematics, pregnant with a science and a metaphysics that were to flower in Plato's time. From it come such words as "theorem," "theory," and "philosophy." This in its turn rests on what might be called a proto-Pythagorean phase, spread all over the East, but with a focus in Susa. And then there was something else again, the stark numerical computing of Babylon.

Speaking of the metaphysical themes—concerned with the starry origin of the human soul—found in Plato, De Santillana comments:

> These examples will do. What they demonstrate is this: the *Timaeus* and, in fact, most Platonic myths, act like a floodlight that throws bright beams upon the whole of "high mythology." Plato did not invent his myths, he used them in the *right* context—now and then mockingly—without divulging their precise meaning: whoever was entitled to the knowledge of the proper terminology would understand them.

Plato, then—if we accept this estimate by a distinguished scholar—may be regarded as someone rather special to look into. We have been doing this lately, provoked by what Jonas and Peter Salk said in a recent paper about what is lacking in modern man. While they don't use the word "virtues," these are the qualities which are prominently missing in our relations with one another—both at home and abroad. We act, in short, without regard. How, one wonders, can this be corrected?

One way would be to start by rehabilitating the idea of virtue, to spread around the belief that it's "all right" to be a virtuous human, so long as you don't talk about it or about yourself. And if we have enough respect for Plato, we might be willing to go to one of his shorter dialogues, the *Meno,* which is entirely devoted to inquiry into the nature of virtue. This, apparently, was above all the most important object in Plato's pursuit of the truth. In the *Meno* the quest comes into focus. When Meno, a well-endowed young man, asks Socrates whether virtue can be taught, Socrates pleads ignorance. He asks Meno what he thinks, and Meno confidently describes a series of virtuous people, making Socrates exclaim:

> I seem to be in luck. I wanted one virtue and I find that you have a whole swarm of virtues to offer. But seriously to carry on this metaphor of the swarm, suppose I have asked you what a bee is, what is its essential nature, and you replied that bees were of many different kinds.

But Socrates is not interested in varieties as to bees, he wants to know about *bee-ness;* and of

the virtues, what is common to them all. Together they bat the question around, until Meno complains that Socrates has numbed him with a barrage of questions, leaving him no idea what to think. Socrates says that he too is confused; his questions only pass his own trouble along. Then he recalls the divinely inspired poets who maintain that the human soul is immortal, and suggests that virtue is knowledge, but not ordinary knowledge, which is easily taught, but knowledge that belongs to the soul, which may be recovered, but only with some difficulty. It appears to him that true virtue is the way of the soul, that the virtues seem several because the soul acts in different relations.

For proof of this contention he questions a boy of Meno's household, a young slave, and draws from him, step by step, what amounts to inherent understanding of the Pythagorean Theorem—of the square of the hypotenuse. Werner Jaeger, in the second volume of *Paideia* (Oxford University Press), summarizes Plato's intent:

> Of course, without the help of Socrates, the slave would not be capable of making all the steps which led him to understand that complicated mathematical system of facts and he makes all the mistakes which a naive person who starts all his thinking with sense perception must inevitably make, before he grasps the real reason for things. But at last he realizes things *must* be in this way and no other; and the realization comes solely from his own inner vision.

From which the conclusion emerges that virtue, which belongs to the soul, can be drawn out by the help of questions—it can or *may* be drawn out—since such teaching is far from simple, and this is the only sense in which virtue can be taught. Otherwise it remains a complete mystery. Jaeger says:

> Plato interprets the potential existence of mathematical knowledge in the soul as a sight seen by it in a previous life. The myth of the immortality of the soul and its migration through various bodies gives that supposition the form and color needed by our mortal and finite imagination. . . . The essential thing for Plato is the realization that "truth about being exists in our soul." This realization sets in motion the process of searching and methodical advance to self-awareness. The search for truth is nothing but the opening-up of the soul, with the contents that naturally lie within it.

There is, however, no finality of definition. Virtue is simply what we practice when we understand ourselves. Jaeger comments:

> Obviously none of the things so keenly desired by the world—health, beauty, wealth, power—really is good for men, if it is not accompanied by knowledge and reason. So this reason—phronesis, that tells us which are true and which are false goods, and which of them we ought to choose—must be the knowledge we are looking for. In *The Republic* Plato calls it the science of right choice and declares that the most important thing in life is to get this kind of knowledge. It is built upon the unshakable foundation of the Ideas, the patterns of the highest values, which the soul finds within itself when it reflects upon the nature of the good, the just, etc.; and it has the power to determine and guide the will. This at least is the direction in which we must look for the answer to Socrates' question "What is virtue?"

The *Meno* ends with Socratic uncertainty, or at least ambiguity:

> If all we have said in this discussion, and the questions we have asked, have been right, virtue will be acquired neither by nature nor by teaching. Whoever has it gets it by divine dispensation without taking thought, unless he be the kind of statesman who can create another like himself. Should there be such a man, he would be among the living, practically what Homer said Tiresias was among the dead, when he described him as the only one in the underworld who kept his wits—"the others are mere flitting shades." Where virtue is concerned such a man would be just like that, a solid reality among the shadows. . . .
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> On our present reasoning then, whoever has virtue gets it by clivine dispensation. But we shall not understand the truth of the matter until, before asking how men get virtue, we try to discover what virtue is in and by itself. Now it is time for me to go. . . .

Again, Jaeger interprets:

> Like *Protagoras*, *Meno* ends with a dilemma. Since the Sophists' teaching cannot make men virtuous, and since the areté of the statesmen who possess virtue naturally is incapable of being transmitted to others, areté seems to exist only by

> divine inspiration—unless a statesman can be found who can make someone else a statesman too. But that "unless," so easily overlooked, really holds the solution to the dilemma: for we know from *Gorgias* that Plato paradoxically thought Socrates was the only true statesman, the statesman who made his fellow-citizens better. *Meno* has shown how his type of knowledge is evoked in the human soul. And so, at the end, it is evident that Socrates believes areté is *both* natural *and* teachable. But if these words are taken in the usual pedagogical sense, then it is *neither* teachable *nor* naturally implanted—unless it is innate like a talent or a disposition which cannot account for itself.

Yet Socrates is confident that he is "giving men a firm foothold in life by knowledge of the highest good."

> In *Phaedo* its strength, rising above and looking beyond the world, appears in the serene, mystical, last hours of the master. There it is shown to be the philosopher's daily and nightly preparation for death. . . . The man who has accustomed his soul to leave his body in this life, and has thereby become sure of the eternity which he carries in his spirit, has lost all fear of death. In *Phaedo,* the soul of Socrates, like the swan of Apollo, soars up to the fields of pure Being before it leaves the body. . . . So Socrates' philosophy is not only a new theory of cognition, but the most perfect vision of the cosmos of human and daemonic powers. Knowledge is central in that picture, because knowledge of its meaning is the creative force which leads and orders everything. For Plato, knowledge is the guide to the realm of the divine.

Virtue, then, is the behavior of the soul that has discovered its own divinity, and it grows from the moment that the soul begins to suspect it. In this sense virtue is a fruit of knowledge, yet a knowledge that must be forged in the fires of life. Care of the fire, its feeding and stoking, can sometimes be taught, but not the knowledge itself.

REVIEW
THE USES OF WHAT WE KNOW

IN "The Specialization of Poetry," which comes first in a new collection of essays by Wendell Berry, *Standing by Words* (North Point Press, 1983, $10.50), there is a passage so informative, so gently but firmly critical, so explanatory of what seems a great deal of nonsense about poetry, that we quote it in full:

> Judging from their tone and their lack of controversy, I conclude that most interviews with poets are conducted by poet watchers. The purpose cannot be a dialogue between two beings of the same general kind; that, surely, would lead to hard questions or, better, to argument. Nor can the purpose be to learn what the poets have to say about their art, for that could be better done in an essay; if it is to be done at all, it ought to be done in an essay. The idea, obviously, is to examine the poet, to study as unobtrusively as possible whatever privacies may be disclosed by the inadvertences of conversation. The interviewer operates in a blind of obsequiousness, hoping the poets will reveal themselves as the strange creatures they *really* are. The interviewers and their intended readers are so convinced of the poet's otherness that they need to stand in his presence and say, "Well, well, so this is a poet." At a poetry reading once, I sat behind a group of such spectators who passed back and forth during the entire evening a huge pair of binoculars. But poet watchers have a limitation in common with bird watchers. Some essential things will not be revealed to them, because their interest is too direct, too imbued with the excitement of a special occasion. They are too much agog. If to an attentiveness appropriately critical and calm the words of a poet reveal something extraordinary, then an extraordinary response is certainly in order. But it is better to be agape afterwards than agog beforehand.
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> The poet watcher is a kind of absurdity. But insofar as they have helped to create him and to the degree that they indulge or exploit or need his excitement, there is also an absurdity in poets. There is apparently now some widespread feeling among poets themselves that they are of a different kind, hence have some special explaining to do. And this explaining often involves an advocacy of the very ideas and conditions that made the explanation necessary in the first place.

What is a poet, or rather a *great* poet? He or she is a human who feels the rhythms, the paces, the interruptions, the climaxes and silences of existence with such intensity that he must give them voice, which now means set them down. He may tell only of sensuous experience, yet the undermeanings of what he sees and feels pervade the earthly scenes he describes, so that the hearer feels them too, but hardly knows why. The poet, someone has said, used exactly the right words for the meanings he expresses. The meanings come before him in all their depth and *demand* appropriate embodiment. He then can't help but write in song, light and joyous, stately or sublime. Words have feeling-tones, nuances, associations, and the poet uses them as a composer makes phrases of melody. There is always some melodic line of meaning, with great ideas breaking forth from the sometimes repetitive phrasings because they declare a transcendence.

Why do we take so much pleasure in song? Because a song is both adventure and confirmation. It is declaration, affirmation, security and insecurity; it is going over what we know interwoven with the intrigue of what we long to know but haven't yet found out. Songs play with meaning, possessed and unpossessed. Can we be both serious and joyous at the same time? The singer can. We like best the singers who invite us to join in, whose rhythms set going resonances and sometimes harmonies that make us part of the song.

The poet is at his best when he has forgotten or does not know that he is a poet—when he is simply the voice of the world, or a fine portion of it, and not someone who has learned to put on an agile performance. The best service of the poet watcher to the poet would be to make him ashamed that he has attracted such attention to himself, and caused what he does to seem a *personal* production. Wilde understood this:

> I did but touch the honey of romance—
> And must I lose a soul's inheritance?

Berry has a moral sense which informs criticism without moralizing:

> But our malaise, both in our art and in our lives, is that we have lost sight of the possibility of right or responsible action. Publicly, we have delegated our capacity to act to men who are capable of action only because they cannot think. Privately, as in much of our poetry, we communicate by ironic or cynical *allusions* to that debased tale of futility, victimization, and defeat, which we have elected to be our story. The prevailing tendency, in poetry and out, is to see people not as actors, but as sufferers. What are John Berryman's dream songs, brilliant as they sometimes are, but the mortifications of a splendid intelligence helpless before its salient occasions? To how great an extent is modern poetry the record of highly refined sensibilities that could think or feel but not do? And must not this passiveness of the poetic sensibility *force* its withdrawal into the world of words where, for want of the sustenance of action, it becomes despondent and self-destructive?

This essay ends with a counsel appropriate for new beginnings:

> Perhaps the time has come to say that there is, in reality, no such choice as Yeats's "Perfection of the life, or of the work." The division implied by this proposed choice is not only destructive; it is based on a shallow understanding of the relation between work and life. The conflicts of work and life, like those of rest and work, would ideally be resolved in balance: *enough* of each. In practice, however, they probably can be resolved (if that is the word) only in tension, in a principled unwillingness to let go of either, or to sacrifice either to the other. But it is a *necessary* tension, the grief in it both inescapable and necessary. . . . The effort to perfect work rises out of, and communes with and in turn informs, the effort to perfect life, as Yeats himself knew and as other poems of his testify. The use of life to perfect work is an evil of the specialized intellect. It makes the most humane of disciplines an exploitive industry.

Of the title essay, "Standing by Words," we shall say but little since we have several times spoken of it in its earlier incarnations. It deals with the inability of the spokesmen of technology to communicate intelligibly with other human beings concerning the essential values of life—not because they are bad or immoral men, but because they never consciously thought about values and the meaning of their and our lives. They *don't*, as Berry says, *know how* to think. They work for the state or industry and have become unable to distinguish between organizational and human interests. This cultural ill is so widespread that its symptoms can hardly be distinguished from "normality."

Short aphoristic paragraphs in a later essay in the book seem the keynote of Wendell Berry's thinking, as both poet and essayist. They are concerned with the human condition, our ignorance, and its resolution through the universal coefficient of understanding. "Reverence," he says, "makes it possible to be whole, though ignorant. It is the wholeness of understanding." The active arm of understanding is a power of mind, by which we may intuit the immeasurable potential of being human:

> The imagination is our way to the divine imagination, permitting us to see wholly—as whole and holy—what we perceive as scattered, as order what we perceive as random.
>
> We live in eternity while we live in time. It is only by imagination that we know this.

Who can think about *eternity*, which has no limit? Yet it is from the rock of eternity that time obtains its rational character. Freedom—its limits and its moorings—is the content of Berry's discourse. In another essay, "People, Land, and Community," he says:

> The evidence is overwhelming that knowledge does not solve "the human problem." Or perhaps we should say instead that all our problems tend to gather under two questions about knowledge: Having the ability and desire to know, how and what should we learn? And, having learned, how and for what should we use what we know?
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> One thing we do know, that we dare not forget, is that better solutions than ours have at times been made by people with much less information than we have. We know too, from the study of agriculture, that the same information, tools, and techniques that in one farmer's hands will ruin land, in another's will save and improve it.
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> This is not a recommendation of ignorance. To know nothing, after all, is no more possible than to

> know enough. I am only proposing that knowledge, like everything else, has its place, and that we need urgently now to *put* it in its place. If we want to know and cannot help knowing, then let us learn as fully and accurately as we decently can. But let us at the same time abandon our superstitious beliefs about knowledge: that it is ever sufficient; that it can of itself solve problems; that it is intrinsically good; that it can be used objectively or disinterestedly. Let us acknowledge that the objective or disinterested researcher is always on the side that pays best. And let us give up our forlorn pursuit of the "informed decision."
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> The "informed decision," I suggest, is as fantastical a creature as the "disinterested third party" and the "objective observer." Or it is as if by "informed" we mean "supported by sufficient information." A great deal of our public life, and certainly the most expensive part of it, rests on the assumed possibility of decisions so informed. Examination of private life, however, affords no comfort whatsoever to that assumption. It is simply true that we do not and cannot know enough to make any important decision.

There is, in other words, no "sure thing," in either life or literature. No lesson seems as important as this one.

COMMENTARY
THINKING AND RATIONALIZATION

IN the next column our reviewer recalls the conclusion of Wendell Berry concerning the attempt by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to explain to the public what had happened in the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island. The language of the Commissioners was a technical jargon used to hide rather than reveal its implications. They were simply unable to think in terms of human values. By both training and lack of moral vocabulary, they could not tell about the real danger in the failure of the nuclear power plant.

A similar conclusion was reached by Erich Kahler in *The Meaning of History,* where he distinguishes between Reason as "a human faculty inherent in the human being" and Rationalization, which he identifies as "a technicalization and functionalization of the way reason proceeds." Commenting on the present, Kahler says that "functional rationality has reached a point of autonomy where it simultaneously serves the most contradictory ends, among them purposes which human reason must regard as monstrous."

Interestingly, this was the verdict on Eichmann reached by Hannah Arendt in her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* a report of his trial. He, too, was unable to think in human terms and seemed quite lacking in awareness of the monstrousness of his "bureaucratic function" in the service of the Nazi government. Miss Arendt was not of course in any way "excusing" what Eichmann did—an interpretation of her book which- brought severe condemnation—but used her *New Yorker* assignment to cover the trial as a means of studying the enormous contradiction of human nature. Eichmann seemed to her a man without moral awareness who was doing his inhuman job as a conscientious bureaucrat. He could not *think,* as a real human being thinks, and felt comfortable serving purposes which "human reason must regard as monstrous."

Readers of *High Noon in Latin America* by Carlos Fuentes—a Harvard Commencement address available from MANAS as a pamphlet at $1.00—may feel that the writer is examining related symptoms of a failure to think. Surely it is time to give serious attention to these two sides of the human mind. If we find ourselves now unable to change current history, we can at least begin to learn from it.

A dreadful mistake was made in the issue of MANAS for May 16. It was dated 1983 instead of 1984. While the volume and number are correct, this printer's and proofreader's error is likely to be confusing, especially to librarians. We invite subscribers to write in the correct year on their issues to reduce some of the harm done. How do such things happen? Well, sometimes proof-readers concentrate on the text, looking for errors, and neglect mere date lines which are always there. We apologize for this unprofessional lapse.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE HUMAN MIND

IN the Newsletter for last November of the "Holistic Education Network" we found a briefly pungent essay by Robin Van Doren Beebe, which begins:

> As I write this I hear the insistent question of a two-year-old who followed me around the house asking "why?" to everything I did and anything I might say. At three, the question changed and became "How do you know?" How different were these questions from those of the sixth and seventh graders I was then teaching in Harlem who asked "When is it due?", "How long does it need to be?", "Will we have a test on Friday?" While the questions of these students were much easier to answer than the persistent questions of my small son, I grieve now at the difference.

Thus schooling, with its structured curriculum, its theory of progress and its attempts to measure that progress, its patterns and order and its dislike of deviations, makes trivial the questions of the young, bringing grief to a teacher who had learned from the unorganized (deschooled?) life around the home that a child's natural interest is in the pursuit of meaning. What sort of "schooling" would keep this interest alive instead of smothering it with the multilayered blanket of routine? Tolstoy knew what to do. So did Bronson Alcott. So does John Holt, but Holt has virtually given up hope of changing or improving the schools. That is why we seldom here give space to accounts of institutions—except for the little ones in which teachers are able and glad to drop routines whenever they get in the way of spontaneous learning.

Mr. Beebe goes on:

> The human mind is designed to ask deep questions, indeed to quest, to seek the Grail within and without. John's [his son's] questions, remarkably similar to the basic questions of every other two and three year old, were not learned from imitation. His parents did not ask him "why" or how he knew. They were the questions of the miracle that is the human seeking to discover pattern and relationships, to order the apparently random events in his universe. He was actively and spontaneously searching for meaning. Despite a mother who finally answered his questions about how she knew with the ultimate answer that "Mothers know everything," John, now 18, has continued to ask questions and to seek the depth patterns that enfold and reveal meaning. Neither suicide nor drugs entice him. He has chosen instead to bike across the country twice, to climb glaciers in Alaska. And, although labelled dyslectic, to study Chinese in Shanghai. Very few people ever told him to be quiet, to be still.

The boy's wonderings, one assumes, were never stifled at home, and they grew strong enough to resist the pressing demands of mediocrity in his "educational" environment, whatever it was. There are some youngsters who simply cannot be spoiled, whether at home or in school. One wonders why. Reading a life of Lafcadio Hearn illuminates the question. He was a lad who simply could not be shaped by anyone else. He could be frightened by others when he was little, almost starved by others who employed him, but nobody could stop him from thinking or adapt his mind to their purposes. This sort of independence may begin early and when it shows up the wise parent will nurture it. It is the child's right to harness and direct his own independence, not anyone else's. Reading a life of Gandhi will illustrate how this may be done to great effect.

Parents sometimes think they know enough to try to stamp out childish wondering. Bertrand Russell is an example of this. In his book, *Education and the Good Life*, he relates:

> I find my boy still hardly able to grasp that there was a time when he did not exist; if I talk to him about the building of the pyramids or some such topic, he always wants to know what he was doing then, and is merely puzzled when he is told that he did not exist. Sooner or later he will want to know what "being born" means, and then we shall tell him.

With a question like that, it seems doubtful that Russell knew any better than his young son. Apparently, it never occurred to him that "being born" may be no more than a single episode in a long series of births and deaths.

The dubious certainties embraced by Mr. Russell, until recently so widely circulated by the

"educated," may explain further experiences by Mr. Beebe:

> Now, working with adults, I am usually greeted with a baffled silence when I ask a new group what their questions are. I know the questions are there, the questions are what brought us together, yet they remain unarticulated, lying beneath the surface of consciousness, obscured by the Western tradition of the student-teacher relationship in which the teacher is the source of both the questions and the answers and reinforced by at least twelve years in the classroom answering someone else's questions.
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> What would happen if we were instead to follow the practice of the great teachers of initiation, to test, in the best sense, the readiness of our students, by asking them what their question is?

How many generations will it take for both the young and the old to start asking the questions discussed by Socrates and his friends on the streets of Athens? This, of course, made trouble for Socrates, which may explain why it may take centuries to get his kind of dialogue going again.

Meanwhile, we borrow from John Holt's *Growing Without Schooling* (Nos. 35 and 36) the reports on Grant Colfax, who studied entirely at home—never went to any school—yet scored so high on the SAT that either Yale or Harvard would be glad to take him, and Harvard did.

Colfax is an eighteen-year-old from Booneville, Calif. (pop. 750) who said that he got his primary education from his parents and his goats.

> My mom and dad taught me English and math. . . . I learned about stuff like embryo transfer from the goats. Also economics. I breed baby goats and sell them for $500 apiece.

The report in No. 35 says:

> Schooling was worked in between building a house, planting the garden, laying the telephone and electricity lines, and constructing a water system. "If we had a big project to do, and the weather was nice, then we put aside our studying," the youth said. "Later we found out that building a tool shed would help us understand the planes and angles in geometry."

No. 36 of Holt's paper tells what happened to Colfax after he got to Harvard (besides being almost mobbed by the media, who got the news about his background from somewhere). According to a press account in a San Francisco newspaper, Colfax told a reporter:

> "After my first chemistry test I came out almost in tears because I had done so poorly," he said. "I felt so bad I called home and told them I might not make it." His intuition was correct. He got only 54% of the answers right. But on the Harvard curve, that was good enough for an A; 39% was worth a B on the test.
>
> His midterm grades in his pre-med course of studies were an A in math, an A in Spanish and an A-minus in chemistry.

Harvard teachers speak highly of Colfax, and an admissions officer said that he was "much more interested in learning than most kids who, like me many years ago, and probably most university students today, are mainly or only interested in grades." John Holt comments in No. 35:

> We're not running this story to show that all home schoolers can get into Harvard (or Yale, etc.), or that they should go to Harvard, or that if they don't get into Harvard it means the parents did something wrong. The only point we want to make is that it is possible, given good test scores, . . . for young people to get into Harvard, Yale, and presumably other prestigious colleges, even though they may never have seen the inside of a school. In other words, there is no policy in these universities against admitting home scholars.

One home-schooling parent wrote in to say that he was now a "respectable" member of his community, since Colfax and his attending publicity had made it "okay" to teach children at home.

FRONTIERS

Learning and Teaching

THE energy, enthusiasm, and literate expression that go into the little papers that come to MANAS from various parts of the world are a source of inspiration and encouragement. Mostly they are about growing things to eat by people who are doing it. Often they tell what may be learned from old tribes that still exist and have lived on the country for thousands of years. An example of this is an article on Food Forests in *Permaculture* (13/8,3 whatever that means), published in Australia in behalf of the movement started by Bill Mollison, which has since spread around the world. The writer, Peter Hardwick, says:

> Though we have at least 20,000 plant species in Australia, we have managed to select and develop only two species for commercial food production: The smooth and the rough Macadamia. . . . The tribal Aboriginal people survived very well on the local bush tucker for at least 40,000 years. Their diet included a healthy proportion of food from local plants. They had excellent knowledge of where the most palatable varieties grew, when they would be in season and how to prepare them for eating. Most of our knowledge of edible native plants comes from the Aboriginal people. (*Permaculture*, 37 Goldsmith St., Maryborough 3465, Australia.)

Pages follow, giving the names of native foods and food trees.

From Greenfield, Mass., comes a paper called *Community Economics*, issued by the Institute of that name. The people there have just published *The Community Land Trust Handhook* and say of their paper in its first issue (Summer, 1983):

> *Community Economics* will be concerned with both theory and practice and will try to strengthen the connections between the two. The Community Land Trust model is important both for its practicality and for the values that it translates into practice. We are concerned with the nuts and bolts required to make a community-based organization work—the immediate neighborhood circumstances that must be dealt with, the legal and financial details that must be managed. We want this publication to be a useful source of information for people wrestling with these practical problems. But we do not want to be so exclusively involved with nuts and bolts that we ignore the ethical concerns in which our approach to community economics is rooted. . . . We'd like to hear from you. (Institute for Community Economics, 151 Montague City Road, Greenfield, Mass. 01302.)

Tilth Newsletter for the summer of 1983 provides an article by Mark Musick on "Ecological Marketing." The paper is the organ of Tilth, a group that in six years has grown to a regional association with members throughout the Pacific Northwest, serving as "a link between urban and rural people growing food and promoting agriculture." (Tilth headquarters is at 4649 Sunnyside North, Seattle, Wash. 98103.) Musick says:

> Small-scale producers have an opportunity to achieve high returns on small amounts of land. Rather than monocrop production for the wholesale market, it is possible to emphasize enterprises which provide higher returns by seeking out specialty markets. For example, a number of orchardists have discovered an increased demand for antique or unusual apple varieties grown for flavor and freshness rather than storage and long-distance shipping. In another example, sheep-raisers specializing in the breeding of animals for natural color and superior wool can receive a premium price for their product from hand spinners, thus achieving higher returns from sheep on less land than large-scale commercial producers.
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> Establish direct links with consumers. . . . Direct marketing usually assures higher returns to the producer while building stronger links between producers and consumers. In this way stability created within the garden or farm is extended to the wider community.

In a recent publication of the New Alchemy Institute on Cape Cod Greg Watson tells about the collaboration of Institute planners with other groups on the Cape—an area of 394 square miles. His objective is to show that "Conservation and development are compatible."

> New Alchemy has initiated a project we call the Cape Cod Bioregional Developmental Plan that proposes to show specifically how the twin goals of development and conservation can be achieved here on Cape Cod. . . . Bioregions are distinct areas,

usually defined by characteristics such as animal, plant, and physical geography, climate, natural history, etc., where the conditions that influence life are similar. They are usually delineated by watersheds.

What makes bioregions different from political boundaries is that they do not carve up natural ecosystems. Ecosystems are nature's whole systems. . . . They recycle water and nutrients, cleanse the air and water, moderate temperature and provide virtually all of the raw materials that drive our economy. The Bioregional Plan we are proposing will attempt to understand the limits of growth on Cape Cod based on a determination of the region's *carrying capacity,* the maximum population which a particular habitat (in this case Cape Cod) can support indefinitely under specified technology and organization.

The first step in assessing the Cape's carrying capacity will be to compile a natural resource inventory of the area. The natural resource inventory was developed by Professor Ian McHarg at the University of Pennsylvania and popularized in his book, *Design with Nature.* The technique consists of creating individual maps of important biological and socioeconomic characteristics of a region and then overlaying them to determine optimal land-use patterns. . . .

The Cape Cod Bioregional Developmental Plan is not an anti-growth strategy. What we hope to show is that we can identify those areas on the Cape that should be restricted from development because of their role in fostering the health and safety of the populace. However, our inventory will also identify those areas where development should be directed.

In order to realize our goal, New Alchemy is working with a consortium of local groups. . . . We will be enlisting the help of individuals within these various groups to help us translate the natural resource inventory into zoning laws and subdivision regulations that actively shift the emphasis for the Cape's land-use controls from the traditional subjective economic criteria (where "highest" and "best" use translates into uncontrolled development) to more objective scientific and natural resource criteria. We will also be working to implement farmland and energy conservation strategies that would contribute significantly to the region's economic development.

The New Alchemy Institute is at 237 Hatchville Road East Falmouth, Mass. 02536.