

## IN QUEST OF BALANCES

WE know—or are getting to know—quite a lot about the balances in nature. Some of them are strong and enduring, others exquisitely delicate in their requirements, subtle in their continuing processes, and magnificent in their occasional flowerings. If something disruptive happens, grosser relationships take over and coarser balances supervene, but "life," you could say, goes on. It is diminished but it goes on. Mountains stripped of foliage make poor watersheds, eventually turning into high desert areas, after which every storm brings a flash flood that will rip and tear its way through the countryside below. Something like a moonscape may result in some regions where, for long generations, little or no food is produced for either animals or man. When certain crucial balances break down, no longer is there "just enough" of the ingredients of a good place or a good life, but always too much or too little. Too much water, then none. Too much sun, not enough humidity. A few desert grasses may stay alive, but that's about all.

Seeing such things happen, noting their blighting effect on the land and on human well-being and hopes, we begin to learn something about balances. The pioneers in conservation and ecology saw and wrote about these things long ago. George Perkins Marsh's *Man and Nature* (1864) is a classic just recently renewed in print as a paperback by Harvard University Press. You don't have to read many such books to obtain a general understanding of the balances in nature, why they are important, how some of them work. The subject is now very much in the foreground of present-day thinking. Ever since Rachel Carson shocked (and enthralled) so many intelligent readers with her account of man's disturbance of nature's often fragile interdependencies, study and reporting about these things has become ever more intensive. The balances of nature are now

entering the luminous zone of human awareness. We may not understand what all these balances "mean" in their final significance, but we know that they have a profound effect on our lives, and that, for the rest of the history of the planet and of human existence, there will be less and less separation between the welfare of nature and human good.

Marsh began his Preface with this paragraph:

The object of the present volume is: to indicate the character and, approximately, the extent of the changes produced by human action in the physical conditions of the globe we inhabit; to point out the dangers of imprudence and the necessity of caution in all operations which, on a large scale, interfere with the spontaneous arrangements of the organic or the inorganic world; to suggest the possibility and the importance of the restoration of disturbed harmonies and the material improvement of waste and exhausted regions; and, incidentally, to illustrate the doctrine that man, is, in both kind and degree, a power of a higher order than any of the other forms of animated life, which, like him, are nourished at the table of bounteous nature.

While some present-day writers, especially those of the "only man is vile" school, would question whether humans are any "higher" than the rest of the earth's inhabitants—considering our recent behavior—practically all would agree with Marsh's general intent. We do have to work for the "restoration of disturbed harmonies" or suffer intolerable consequences. We probably ought to do this simply because some moral instinct tells us it is *right*, but we'd *better* do it or we won't survive. Yet man is surely "higher" in the sense that he seems to have a choice in such matters. His self-consciousness and reason give him a unique place in the natural scheme. Acknowledging this, a British scientist of some distinction has said:

Yet to what purpose has this "self-consciousness" of the whole organism (which comes

to focus in man) been put, . . . other than to the self-centered, blind satisfaction of human greed as man exploits the organism for his own use. . . ?

A simple truth of Life on earth is that the whole survives or nothing does, just as the survival of the body is essential to the survival of the mind. Rather than justifying human function as it has been known on earth, man is well over-due for a dose of humility and a move toward picking up his responsibilities. The responsibilities of functioning as an integral, sensitive, and intelligent part of the natural organism of this earth . . . and of letting his gift of self-consciousness be exercised to the blessing of the whole creation of Life. (James Lovelock, in *Mother Earth News* for July, 1976.)

Does this give us a theory about the meaning of the balances in nature? Not really, although it certainly says things that need to be said. It is true, but not fully persuasive. Could we get a compelling theory of meaning to fill out the intuitions of such people? Well, we ought to try.

The present situation, so far as a theory is concerned, is about as Lawrence J. Henderson put it years ago, in an almost forgotten book, *The Fitness of the Environment* (1913), First he talked about the fact of the harmonious balances in nature, all in the service of life as we know it. Then he tried to feel his way to a sense of the meaning of these cunning arrangements:

There is, in truth, not one chance in countless millions that the many unique properties of carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen, and especially of their stable compounds, water and carbonic acid, which chiefly make up the atmosphere of a new planet, should simultaneously occur in the three elements otherwise than through the operation of law which somehow connects them together. There is no greater probability that these unique properties should be without due cause uniquely favorable to the organic mechanism. These are no mere accidents; and explanation is to seek. It must be admitted, however, that no explanation is at hand. . . .

In short, everything works together as if there were some underlying purposive order, but we don't know what it is. We do know that when things go wrong, and we have had a part in their going wrong, we sometimes see the connection

between our mistakes and the penalties nature exacts. Sometimes we learn to do better through a sensible sort of pragmatism. But at the same time, like Henderson, we reach for a larger meaning. A comprehensive theory would be a great help. Some inward sense tells us that the right theory would explain a lot more.

Speaking of our lack of understanding, Henderson muses:

There is but one immediate compensation for this complexity; a proof that somehow, beneath adaptations, peculiar and unsuspected relationships exist between the properties of matter and the phenomena of life, that the process of cosmic evolution is indissolubly linked with the fundamental characteristics of the organism; that logically, in some obscure manner, cosmic and biological evolution are one. In short, we appear to be led to the assumption that the genetic or evolutionary processes, both cosmic and biological, when considered in certain aspects, constitute a single orderly development that yields results not merely contingent, but resembling those which in human action we recognize as purposeful. For, undeniably, two things which are related together in a complex manner by reciprocal fitness make up in a very real sense a unit—something quite different from the two alone, or the sum of the two, or the relationship between the two. In human affairs such a unit arises only from the effective operation of purpose.

This is strong persuasion for looking for a theory of meaning for ourselves and the world. There is hardly any difference between meaning and purpose. To have no purpose is to live a meaningless life. Is there a common, collaborative purpose which gives meaning to both man and nature and illuminates the complexity of their relationships with a single light?

We feel that there is, but we don't know its form or rationale, and even to start a theory of this sort one must make a big metaphysical leap. We are not planning on any such adventure here—we could hardly do it justice—but it seems obligatory to say that humans can't do without such leaps—without some sort of transcendental outline of what life is all about, as something to look up to, attempt to confirm, and meanwhile to live by as

well as we can. That these leaps are made, have been made, will be made, and that they are the source of high aspiration, persistent resolve, applicable philosophy, and binding religion there can be no doubt. Such matters are hardly arguable. What remains obscure, however, is why they don't have greater influence. Why, in other words, despite some magnificent philosophy and religion, have human beings made such an incredible mess of their lives and of large portions of the world which is their only home?

A short and simple answer would be to say that while transcendental theories or doctrines often sound true, their long-term fulfillments seem remote or improbable to many people. Or you could say that certain opacities in our feeling and thinking prevent a realizing sense of the truth in the round of those theories. And we can always argue that we just don't know which one is true!

Another approach—one with some probability in it—would be that just as there are finely drawn balances in nature, so there are corresponding balances in man, and that the two sets of balances would work together in perfect harmony if we could get our own balances in order. But here, again, the assumption of a metaphysical scheme is involved—the old idea that man is the microcosm of the macrocosm. Implied is the possibility that locked inside us is potential knowledge of all the world. We have an intuition that this may be the case, but we're not sure. And think of the formidable implications—how far away they will take us from the familiar and once authoritative certainties of scientific teachings! Where shall we find security and confidence enough to adopt daring new beliefs? Deciding for the microcosm idea is going to take some courage, and probably some additional evidence of a persuasive sort. Meanwhile, we have this problem of learning what ought to be the balances in our lives.

What seems a currently strengthening intuitive perception comes in here—one gaining rich confirmation from experience. It is that

people who have either spontaneous or deliberated balances in their lives get along best with nature. Their relationships with the environment are mutually beneficial. They are naturally frugal, naturally orderly, and spontaneously averse to any sort of exploitive activity. With a population of such people, we would accomplish most of what the informed environmentalists hope for, practically without effort. But we don't have that kind of a population, only the nucleus of one.

What can we say about human balances? A great many things might be said. One is that a principle or a vision, if it has comprehensive implications, always supplies balances that seem both application and diverse vindication of the basic "good idea." Take for example a thoughtful passage in Harold J. Laski's *The American Democracy*, which concerns a principle lost rather than found:

The importance of Americanism until the end of the Civil War was a faith, or a principle of faith, which insisted on the elevation and fulfillment of the ordinary man. If it left an undemocratic Europe unconvinced, at least that principle left it profoundly disturbed. But the importance of Americanism to Europe since the end of the Civil War has lain in principles like industrial combination, scientific management, mass production, competitive power. The failure to revitalize Americanism has reduced it from a moral principle to a technological one. It has deprived it of a purpose which achieves in a community a new level of integration. In its new phase Americanism has transferred the center of its speculative effort from the issue of what a man is to what a man has.

As a single, isolated diagnosis, that seems about right. A central conception of the eighteenth-century vision was lost, and this became obvious after the Civil War. The war put an end to slavery (only nominally, many say), but it also marked the end of a series of personal and social balances we could ill afford to lose. Writing about the cultural decline which set in during the second half of the nineteenth century, Thorstein

Veblen said in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1908):

The wave of reversion seems to have received its initial impulse in the psychologically disintegrating effects of the Civil War. Habituation to war entails a body of predatory habits of thought, whereby clannishness in some measure replaces the sense of solidarity, and a sense of invidious distinction supplants the impulse to equitable, everyday serviceability. As an outcome of the cumulative action of these factors, the generation which follows a season of war is apt to witness a rehabilitation of the element of status, both in its social life and in its scheme of devout observances and other symbolic or ceremonial forms. Throughout the eighties, and less plainly traceable through the seventies also, there was perceptible a gradually advancing wave of sentiment favouring quasi-predatory business habits, insistence on status, anthropomorphism, and conservation generally. The more direct and unmediated of these expressions of the barbarian temperament, such as the recrudescence of outlawry and the spectacular quasi-predatory careers of fraud run by certain "captains of industry," came to a head earlier. . . .

These searching (if in our day gentle) strictures are sufficient indication of what the massive breakdown of balance called war does to the inner balances in human beings—how it pulls people out of shape, vulgarizes their motives and externalizes their relations with one another. The wars of the twentieth century, far worse than the Civil War, have had corresponding demoralizing effects.

Meanwhile, the pointed accuracy of Veblen's account of what war does to the civilian population seems obvious enough, so the question becomes: How can we begin to get going once more some of the most desirable and necessary balances in human beings? These, after all, are the essentials of any sort of improvement in either individual life or our relations with others. Without these personal balances there seems little possibility of achieving at a social level the reforms required for reciprocal relationships with the balances in nature.

An interesting account of how Sim Van der Ryn recovered some balances for himself, and

how, as State Architect of California, he is endeavoring to apply them in the work of the California Office of Appropriate Technology, is given in a recent interview (published in *Not Man Apart* for February). Asked by the interviewer, Anne Bartz, how he acquired his own sense of natural balances, he said:

When I moved to the country, I began to experience in my own life things that I'd only been aware of intellectually. Like garbage. When you live in the city and buy a lot of packaged food, you find your garbage can filling up fast. It doesn't look so good, but you just carry the stuff outside and put it in the trash. And you get acquainted with how much stuff you're actually wasting. . . . Buying food in bulk, and not crowding your life with cardboard, and recycling what you can, and composting what's compostable—these acts don't make somebody else do all this work for you. Or there's water. If you don't have that much water, you begin to realize how much water you use.

The experiential is self-enforcing; the intellectual is not—you just get more and more data about something. That is the challenge we face in the kind of work . . . I'm doing both at Farallones Institute [which he founded in Berkeley, Calif.] and up here in Sacramento [California's capital city where the state offices are]. Up here is harder because, how do you get this information across, or how do you design systems so that people will internalize awareness of resource limitations? Carl Rogers says, "Any true learning is self-appropriated," and that's how I feel. People need to learn things for themselves.

In *The Living Soil*, Lady Eve Balfour points out that wherever you find really healthy people, you find that their foods are "grown by a system of returning all the wastes of the entire community to the soil in which they are produced." That is a man-nature balance. How can people be helped to grasp its importance? Van der Ryn is working on this. He is working on alternatives to the enormously expensive sewerage systems for cities, and concerning rural areas he says:

A septic tank and leaching field is a very simple mechanical technology but a rather complex biological system. That doesn't fit the way sanitary engineers *think*. They like a really complex

mechanical system, with a crude biology. So we're saying there's a choice, that is, privately owned on-site systems are working well. The alternative is not to go to a centralized, energy-intensive, terribly expensive and environmentally damaging sewer. . . . When I got involved in the way we're "disposing of wastes" I began to see that the whole thing was totally nuts. People were having problems with septic tanks, and people didn't have water, and I thought "Why the hell am I putting half my potable water supply through my toilet?"

With the composting privy, particularly the one I designed, there are some problems because you have to maintain it. If you get people to be responsible for their own waste, we don't need an EPA [Environmental Protection Agency]. There are real questions about systems that require that level of maintenance—how do you ensure that people will maintain them and that they don't become a nuisance? . . . People don't know how they work; there's very little known about the geology of the soil, of the leaching field. In many areas the septic tanks are not maintained, so the engineers come in and say, "Aha! Let's build a sewer." This is a centralized system, run by a bunch of experts. The alternative is a local government entity, called a maintenance district, or management district. It has taxing authority and is run by somebody, preferably a local person with real expertise in maintaining septic tanks, leaching fields, and other kinds of on-site systems—composting privies and the like. And a well-operated system, including making all the improvements and designing special leaching systems, costs about a tenth of what building a sewer does, and you can operate it for far less.

Asked what would provide the motivation for change, Van der Ryn said:

As I've said before, I think it has to be experiential. I have seen people change, so I have faith in that. . . . The whole idea of an Office of Appropriate Technology is to show people that in their daily lives there are choices. And if they don't make them they're still making choices. I'm talking about the way they choose to live: how they get to work, what they eat, what they drive, or how they move around, spend their leisure time, where they spend their money. I mean to present the choices. . . .

We're going to do a complete energy analysis. So in the city we promote transportation options, a real energy conservation program, some substitution such as solar, and good use of what open space there

is for things like gardens. It won't make a big impact on food production, but it's psychological. . . .

My whole interest, and I guess that's why it's nice to be State Architect, is in creating examples. Because unless you do, how do you answer the Exxon ads that say solar energy is a nice idea; maybe 100 years from now it'll serve 36 per cent of the needs. You have to show people that's a lie.

One sort of balance achieved leads to recognition of others, quite possibly to balances which are even more important but can't be felt or even suspected until the *habit* of looking for balances gets established. California has plenty to be ashamed of, but not the sort of beginnings here described.

## REVIEW

### REPORT ON SPANISH ANARCHISTS

THE ANARCHIST COLLECTIVES (Free Life Editions, 1974, \$10.00), edited by Sam Dolgoff, deals with the social and human achievement which went on under the difficult circumstances of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), a much neglected chapter of modern history. Few American readers had even heard of this remarkable enterprise in self-government and industrial and agricultural self-management, involving millions of Spanish people, until Noam Chomsky's *American Power and the New Mandarins* came out in 1969. Chomsky made it plain that in the midst of a heroic and exhausting struggle, Spanish peasants and workers, schooled in libertarian customs and ideals for generations, reorganized the economic and social life of large areas of the country. Chomsky also showed that conventional historians have all but ignored what they did.

This book holds interest not only for anarchists and students of revolution seeking a better understanding of the contest between Marxists and followers of Bakunin, Proudhon, and Kropotkin. It becomes evident that behind the political labels of the time a deep awakening in common folk was going on, finding expression in multiform ways. The political struggles of Europe are not easy for Americans to understand, since "class" plays so small a part in their lives, but an account of what these Spanish people did, and in so short a time, breaks loose from the category of "political" action, becoming evidence of a strong upsurge of the human spirit.

Mr. Dolgoff's book is a tapestry of effective quotation from writers who were on the scene. A summary of the achievements of the Spanish workers is provided in the words of Gaston Leval:

In Spain during almost three years, despite a civil war that took a million lives, despite the opposition of political parties (republicans, left and right Catalan separatists, socialists, Communists, Basque and Valencian regionalists, petty bourgeoisie,

etc.), this idea of libertarian communism was put into effect. Very quickly more than 60% of the land was collectively cultivated by the peasants themselves, without landlords, without bosses, and without instituting capitalist competition to spur production. In almost all the industries, factories, mills, workshops, transportation services, public services, and utilities, the rank and file workers, their revolutionary committees, and their syndicates reorganized and administered production, distribution, and public services without capitalists, high salaried managers, or the authority of the state.

Even more: the various agrarian and industrial collectives immediately instituted economic equality in accordance with the essential principle of communism, "From each according to his ability and to each according to his needs." They coordinated their efforts through free association in whole regions, created new wealth, increased production (especially in agriculture), built more schools, and bettered public services. They instituted not bourgeois formal democracy but genuine grass roots functional libertarian democracy, where each individual participated directly in the revolutionary reorganization of social life. They replaced the war between men, "survival of the fittest," by the universal practice of mutual aid, and replaced rivalry by the principle of solidarity.

The first part of the book is devoted to historical background and theory. Most interesting to the general reader will be the second part, supplying eye-witness accounts of what happened from village to village, town to town, and in both industry and public service. Quotation gives the grain of actual events. The following is reprinted from a French anarchist journal:

The collectivization of the land properties of Count Romanonés in Miralcampo and Azuqueca by the Castilian Regional Peasant Federation merits special attention. The peasants altered the topography of the district by diverting the course of the river to irrigate new land, thus tremendously increasing cultivated areas. They constructed a mill schools, collective dining halls, and new housing for the collectivists.

A few days after the close of the Civil War, Count Romanonés reclaimed his domains, expecting the worst, certain that the revolutionary vandals had totally ruined his property. He was amazed to behold the wonderful improvements made by the departed

peasant collectivists. When asked their names, the Count was told that the work was performed by the peasants in line with plans drawn by a member of the CNT [National Labor Confederation, a large, anarcho-syndicalist labor union founded in 1910] Building Workers' Union, Gomez Abril, an excellent organizer chosen by the Regional Peasant Federation. As soon as Abril finished his work he left and the peasants continued to manage the collective.

Learning that Gomez Abril was jailed in Guadalajara and that he was in a very precarious situation, the Count succeeded in securing his release from jail and offered to appoint him manager of all his properties. Gomez declined, explaining that a page of history had been written and his work finished.

From the same source is an account of the changes wrought in the village of Magdalena de Pulpis, in the Levant, a region on the east coast of Spain embracing five provinces. Practically all the 1400 inhabitants joined the collective, although some with misgivings. The new way of life included these features:

No one paid rent. Housing was free and completely socialized, as was medical care. There were two doctors. Both spontaneously welcomed the new way of life. But one doctor moved to Castellón, the provincial capital. The other doctor remained, receiving the same rations as the rest of the people. The pharmacist also joined the collective. Medicine supplies, transfer to hospitals in Barcelona or Castellón, surgery, services of specialists—all was paid for by the collective.

The collective obtained money by selling products outside the village, which were paid for in pesetas. The retail merchants closed their shops and voluntarily joined the commune. They organized themselves into a cooperative, where everyone could purchase all available commodities. The cooperative was installed in a former chapel big enough to meet all needs. Some of the merchants worked in the new cooperative. The hairdressers also got together and opened one spacious, well-equipped salon. The dressmakers and tailors, housed in a single large workshop, offered better clothes and services. The carpenters also installed their collective. . . .

Things moved unhurriedly. Life flowed serenely through this village, as it had in bygone days, but now with a new feeling of confidence and security never known before. And we would have dearly loved to

linger in these antiquated houses (which the commune will doubtless soon replace) but tranquilly, without despair, without the uneasiness about the bleak prospects for tomorrow that had for so many centuries plagued the good people of Magdalena de Pulpis.

The peasant and worker organizers of the change throughout Spain had little help from intellectuals. Gaston Leval remarks that the initiative came from the people:

For example the Aragon collectives: among their organizers I found only two lawyers, in Alcorina. They were not strictly speaking, intellectuals. But if what they did, together with their peasant and worker comrades, was well done, it was no better than what could be seen in Esplus, Binefar Calanda, and other collectives. What was a surprise was to find that a great many of these peasants were illiterate. But they had faith, practical common sense, the spirit of sacrifice, and the will to create a new world.

I don't want to make a demagogic apology for ignorance. Those men had a vitality, a heart, a spirit, of a kind that education cannot give and official education often smothers. Spiritual culture is not always bookish, and still less academic. It can arise from the very conditions of living, and when it does, it is more dynamic. . . . It was not by the work of our intellectuals who are more literary than sociological, more agitators than practical guides—that the future has been illuminated. And the peasants—libertarian or not—of Aragon, Levant, Castile, Estramadura, Andalusia, and the workers of Catalonia, understood this and acted alone. . . . As for the government, they were as inept in organizing the economy as in organizing the war.

In Calanda, a town in Aragon, the show place of the new way was a Ferrer (libertarian) school which accommodated 1,233 children. The ease with which such towns became collective is understandable when it is realized that 3,500 Of Calanda's 4,500 inhabitants were members of the CNT. The anarchists practice "tolerance":

The relations between the libertarian collectivists and the "individualists" (small peasant proprietors) are cordial. There are two cafés: the collective's café serves free coffee and in the other café the "individualists" have to pay for their coffee. The collective operates a barbershop, giving free

haircuts and (if desired) free shaves twice weekly. . . . The village generates its own power from a waterfall. There is no scarcity of clothing. By arrangement with a Barcelona textile plant, oil is exchanged for cloth, dresses, etc. Garments are distributed in rotation to 40 persons daily.

How all this happened, why it happened, and why it was not allowed to continue are questions answered by this book. In a thoughtful introduction Murray Bookchin muses about the historical significance of what the Spanish anarchists accomplished, remarking that the free society of the future will have to outgrow the conditionings of both bourgeois and "working class" ideas:

This amounts to saying that workers must see themselves as human beings, not as class beings; as creative personalities, not as "proletarians," as self-affirming individuals, not as "masses." And the destiny of a liberated society must be the free commune, not a confederation of factories, however self-administered; for such a confederation takes a part of society—its economic component—and reifies it into the totality of society. Indeed, even that economic component must be humanized precisely by bringing an "affinity of friendship" to the work process, by diminishing the role of onerous work in the lives of producers, indeed, by a total "transvaluation of values" (to use Nietzsche's phrase) as it applies to production and consumption as well as social and personal life.

This is a way of saying that no one of the specialties of practical existence—not politics, not economics—should be allowed to govern our lives. What the Spanish anarchists accomplished was to show, without fanfare, without elaborate theory, although with deep principles, what can actually be done to move in this direction.

We should end this inadequate comment on a book that cannot be easily summarized by speaking of the valuable contribution of its editor, Sam Dolgoff, who weaves together these threads of recent history with devotion and skill. Whatever one may think of anarchism as a doctrine, anarchist writers are notably truthful, guileless, and seek only the impartial assent of

their readers. They rest their case on the potentialities of human beings.



## *COMMENTARY* **WHOM DO YOU TRUST?**

AT about the time we were checking the page proofs on this issue we received a letter from a reader about the book considered in Review. She had noticed in the March 16 issue that we were planning attention to Dolgoff's *The Anarchist Collectives*, and wrote to relate her own experience with this book.

Having it as an assignment for review for a contemporary journal, she read and admired it. But then she read another book by a Communist heroine of the Civil War in Spain, obtaining a very different impression—which was no doubt to be expected. This complicated her reviewing task, but matters became still worse after she talked to a man just returned from post-Franco Spain. He had read both books and said that neither one presented the facts. He had another book to offer.

After reading this third volume—which by no means sounded like "the whole truth"—she simply gave up. "I never wrote any review."

A lot of the time that may seem the best thing to do. We are printing our review without change for the reason that we trust the integrity of George Orwell, Noam Chomsky, and Murray Bookchin, and for the reason that the reports of the Spanish anarchists on the Civil War are largely unknown to American readers. The only thing we somewhat questioned while reading the book was its air of confident righteousness—something that can hardly be eliminated from polemical writing.

Often, in such matters, one question that should inform one's thinking is: Whose illusions—since we all have them—will do the least harm?

It is certainly the case that people for whom the refusal to coerce is a first principle are not likely to do much harm to other people. Doubtless the record of the Spanish anarchists on this account is imperfect. Actually, anarchists may find that they expect too much of human nature at its present stage of development. But surely it is

better to expect too much than too little! And *any* demonstration of the human capacity for social achievement without the whip of authority or the push of acquisitive self-interest is worth knowing about.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### THE FOXFIRE "LEVELS"

IN the February 16 issue we described Eliot Wigginton's paperback, *Moments* (\$3.95—order from IDEAS, 1785 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036), telling about the teaching accomplished through getting out the folklore magazine, *Foxfire*, which has been going for about nine years. Our review spoke of the "four levels" of learning experienced by the highschool students in Wigginton's class in journalism (originally "English"), and the MANAS editorial in that issue suggested a comparison of Wigginton's Levels with Lawrence Kohlberg's Six Stages of moral growth. Here we want to tell briefly about Wigginton's Levels and illustrate what he means by them.

The first task, as Wigginton sees it—or as experience has shown—is to get the student past the first hurdle: finding out that he can *do* things:

I believe that before a student can act *effectively*, he has to know he can *act*. . . . I believe that he can't often move beyond himself until he is comfortable with himself and his capabilities—convinced of his worth. . . .

The vehicle I use with each student at this level is the individual creation of an article that will appear in our magazine. I'm not really concerned with its length. I'm just concerned that each student go through all the steps necessary to complete that article successfully, and then see it in print. Other teachers will choose different vehicles that will prove to be equally effective. . . .

The students also learn to take pictures for the magazine:

I may say to a student, "Look, this camera looks like a Chinese puzzle, but it's really not so bad. Come on outside with me and I'll show you how it works, and then you can fire off a couple of shots yourself and we'll print them and see what happens. Right?"

But I do not say to the student, "The main purpose of this exercise is to prove to you that you can operate a camera and thereby add to your sense of

self-esteem and satisfy your ego." Much of the work I do in this direction I never verbalize at all. I simply watch, work behind the scenes to make things happen, and constantly ask myself if each kid is coming along, and if not, where I am going wrong?" I want to give him a deep, firm, unselfish sense of worth—not turn him into a self-indulgent egomaniac.

Level II is the area in which competences are verified, broadened, and matured:

Students who have come through the first level should now be able to take constructive criticism or questioning or challenging without feeling threatened. . . . [A student] should also begin to develop the capacity to look at the work of other kids and criticize it constructively and sensitively, always being aware of the fact that there are many ways to solve a problem. . . . I've had lots of good times with exercises that illustrate to my kids that there's not usually one way alone to do something. One thing I've tried is giving each kid one page, one piece of text, one title and two photographs (all identical) and asked them to create their own one-page layouts and be able to explain and justify them. Many of the layouts come out differently, and many are just as good as others. Certain weak points will be spotted in some, and agreed upon as weak by most of the class, but they'll be surprised at how many good solutions there are to the problem.

The students learn to handle the *Foxfire* correspondence, which is heavy.

I mentioned before the three girls who answer many of my letters for me—I trust them to speak for all of us. At times, I get those girls to spread the letters around to other kids who haven't had that experience yet, and work with those kids to help them get answers written. Sometimes, they team up with another kid or two to handle a particularly complex request. A man may write in, for example, and ask if we would be willing to track down for him the site where his grandfather was buried in our [Georgia] county, and get a picture of the site for him. Another might ask if we would talk to the local blacksmiths and see if any of them would be willing to make him a buggy wheel of certain dimensions, or a full wagon, complete with harness and seat. The kids head out into the country and see what they can come up with, and then get back in touch.

Kids at this level are also the ones who handle our copyrighting, send in the actual bank deposits, and make major purchases pretty much on their own.

They are the magazine, and they have earned the right to carry out its business, and shape the face it shows to the world.

The third level is called "Beyond Self" by Eliot Wigginton. One of the best sources of material for *Foxfire*, through the years, has been Aunt Arie Carpenter: "A visit to her log house is a sure-fire fine experience every time, for each time she insists on feeding the kids who come, and gets them all to help her cook the meal on her ancient, wood-burning stove." The idea of Level III—

The students should want to go back to previous contacts not for information or to get help but to provide help.

Since we began interviewing Aunt Arie, for example, the kids have wanted to go up to her house to do anything for her she'll let them do: to till her ground, plant it, tend the garden, harvest the crop, can her food, clean her house, help her cook—or even just go up to visit and keep her company. When she was in the hospital for an operation recently, a constant flood of kids came to see her. . . .

Another story:

The kids also found a talented young songwriter in our county. His name is Varney Watson, and he's just barely making it, his job in the rug mill the only support for his wife and three children. The kids began publishing his songs in the magazine and getting them copyrighted for him, and the word began to get around. This year, Varney was invited to a song-writer's conference at the Highlander Center in Knoxville, and was also asked to perform at the Smithsonian's Festival of American Folklife in July. It appears that finally, Varney will begin to get the kind of recognition he deserves.

And when the kids found out later this year that he needed a new guitar, they decided to pay him retroactively for the songs he had allowed *Foxfire* to publish, thus getting him enough cash for the guitar he now plays.

Level IV is Independence—when the teacher begins to know less and less about young people who are learning to be confidently on their own. Wigginton tells about a trip to Washington, D.C., with two students:

Neither of them had been to Washington before, and after the speeches they gave, I entrusted them to

several teachers from Western High School who wanted them to come over and talk to their kids. We met back at the hotel that night, and they told me about the kids in that high school, and how a group of the students wanted to get a project like ours going there, and how they hoped they had been able to help out.

The next day, our last day in town, I had some business to attend to, so I set them free to sightsee as they might not have the chance to get back for years. When we met again that day, I found that rather than taking in the town, they had, on their own, caught a cab back to the high school and had spent the whole day there working with those same kids. There's a magazine called *Cityscape* going there now.

The book ends:

I am continually asked what my old kids are doing, how I affected them. How do I answer something like that? Most are gone. Some come back once in a while and ask, "Do you remember when we did that together? I never forgot that, and I never will. That experience made a difference, and I carry it with me."

And that's about all. Enough? It's got to be. We remain here, members of a hit-and-miss profession. I'm never satisfied with what I've done, but I'm convinced that if I didn't make some difference in their lives, I at least did not waste their time.

## *FRONTIERS*

### The Uses of Exaggeration

WE have from Canada a letter objecting to our approving quotation of a passage in William Irwin Thompson's recent book, *Evil and World Order*. (Review, Jan. 5.) Mr. Thompson said:

President Nixon thought that in moving to create an all-volunteer army he was moving to demilitarize the country; actually he was completing the transformation of America into a banana republic. Professional soldiers have little difficulty in firing on civilian crowds, and army juntas have even less difficulty in taking governments away from the effete "pinkos."

Our reader writes:

You seem to approve of his conclusion ("His aim is good," you say, "and his generalizations have substance") that by moving to create an all-volunteer army Nixon was completing the transformation of America into a banana republic. "Professional soldiers," says WIT, "have little difficulty in firing on civilian crowds. . . ." Now this is so idiotic as to make one weep—particularly when it is disseminated in a periodical that espouses all the virtues. Where are the facts to support WIT's generalization? We here in Canada *never* have conscription except in time of total war, and even then only reluctantly, because of troubles with Quebec. Where are our professional soldiers having little difficulty in firing on civilian crowds? How much difficulty did the conscripted armies of the Czar have in firing on the civilian crowds of 1905? And so on and so on. WIT's generalizations hold only if you are ready to be excessively selective with your facts. It takes a heap of attributes to be a banana republic, and a professional army is only one of them—and it may, for all I know, be more effect than cause.

Well, if this reader is mainly reproaching Mr. Thompson (and MANAS) for cavalier neglect of the historical record in Canada—which is indeed a part, perhaps an enviable part, of America—we stand convicted of the usual egocentric habits of citizens of the United States. Canada sets the rest of the world a good example in many ways.

Let us also admit the charge that Thompson is in this case highly selective in his choice of facts. It then becomes useful to ask: Had he a

reason for this? What is his underlying point? He is actually suggesting in this paragraph—as is fairly apparent from the context—that some kinds of acts generate results the opposite of those intended. Quite possibly he means that the notoriously mixed motives behind most corporate acts have this effect, the discernment of which has obvious importance to citizen decision-makers. Another way of considering this idea would be to weigh the truth-content of Montaigne's self-examining verdict: "I find that the best virtue I have has in it some tincture of vice," and then to consider the entry in Emerson's journal that every vice is the exaggeration of "a necessary and virtuous function."

There is some historical foundation for contending that a volunteer (professional) army has considerably less virtue (in relation to the general welfare) than a ("democratic") conscript army. The German militarists of the early nineteenth century supported liberal reforms in the Fatherland as means of convincing Germany's conscript soldiers that they had a stake in the country's conflicts—to make them, in short, properly patriotic. This is of course a nationalist point of view. (See Chapter V of Alfred Vagts' *History of Militarism*.)

The civil rights champion has another outlook. He holds that military service should not be required of those who find it immoral or odious. Hence the superiority of a volunteer army. Mr. Thompson seems to attribute this motive to Mr. Nixon, which may be a bit generous. But regardless of the former president's intentions, there is the hardly disputable fact that an army of highly trained professionals—made up of people who *want* to be in the army—often becomes the amoral tool of the ruling clique; an equal probability is that power-hungry military egotists will themselves try to take over the country. Thompson is not interested here in the chronicler's goal of measured accuracy, but in suggesting that we give attention to what subtler

verity there may be in Seneca's claim: "Vices creep into our hearts under the name of virtues."

Mr. Thompson is selective with a purpose. He looks for illustrations of the contention that "We become what we hate." His Canadian critic would doubtless say that he finds them too easily. This may be true, but does it matter so greatly? One makes one's own correction of inadequate illustration in order to examine fairly a writer's point and intent.

Of course, whatever you say about any of the mass societies of the present, contradictory instances can be found. The situation is much as George P. Elliot put it more than a dozen years ago:

Nothing is harder than to have a clear, steady and sound idea of what society is and what it should be. I must speak for myself: I realize that I could not define the word to anyone's satisfaction; like many, I sometimes in desperation identify society with the state—whence horrors ensue. The word "democratic" has ceased to have any more independent meaning than the word "united" in the United States. We have no good analogy by which to comprehend our society.

During the early days of a country—in our early days, at any rate—it was fairly easy to comprehend a society in terms of the vision of its founders. In the case of the United States, there was then coherent truth in the vision, enough to last through the first half of the nineteenth century. Whitman did what he could to keep the vision alive, but after the Civil War even Whitman, enthusiast that he was, began to have serious doubts. During the hundred years or so since, only the doubts have multiplied—some would say in geometrical progression. Articulation of vision has been largely replaced by the sharp brilliance of self-criticism.

Mr. Thompson is one such critic—one of the best, if *At the Edge of History* be taken as evidence. By no means without vision, he practices a kind of generalization that throws new light on the human situation, including the American situation. While there are hazards in generalizing, as Elliot points out, certain things

need very much to be said. It has seemed to us that Mr. Thompson has an effective way of saying them—in the form of impressionistic glancing blows to isolate certain traits and tendencies.

No doubt he exaggerates, but the point gets made in a few words. And as for the place in discourse of exaggeration, we know no better defense than the one offered by Thoreau:

Exaggeration! was ever any virtue attributed to a man without exaggeration? Was ever any vice, without infinite exaggeration? . . . He who cannot exaggerate is not qualified to utter truth. No truth, we think, was ever expressed but with this sort of emphasis, so that for the time there seemed to be no other. Moreover, you must speak loud to those who are hard of hearing, and so you acquire the habit of shouting to those who are not.