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# NO SERIOUS MISTAKES

THE failure of people to understand each other—to be able to see the right as well as the wrong in diverse or opposed opinions and goals—is a puzzle needing exploration. Righteousness is the distinctively human motive in life—the savor in the fulfillment of lesser intentions diminishing as human beings mature—while the struggle to be true to oneself has primary attention in all the philosophical religions. We honor Arjuna because he finally saw for himself the point of Krishna's instruction: he had to do his duty no matter what his friends and relations said. We honor Luther because he challenged a vast and powerful institution, announcing that he would obey his conscience, despite pope and council, and come what may. We respond with warmth to the passion of Patrick Henry's cry, "Give me liberty or give me death."

But no thoughtful human can be satisfied with righteousness alone. Solitary virtue is gained at the cost of love. The good is understood as good by reason of its enjoyment by a company of souls. Goodness may not be only what a consensus of right-thinking men decide, but if a variety of humans find it impossible to reach substantial fellowship in goodness, what *good* is it? A private moral victory, if it leads to isolating virtue, is only a temporary affair. Its reward of loneliness may be as much a hell for the virtuous man as the pain of the sinner. Both, whatever their differences and indifferences, long to be understood.

There is also much doubt about collective righteousness which is not linked with understanding. What is the height of a righteousness which has neither capacity nor inclination to seek the reason in opposing views? When urgent pressures of righteousness are armed with political power, the darkest crimes known to history may result. Time may dull the horror of hideous offenses, but even a little reading about the past renews the question: Why is it so difficult for people to recognize the good in other men's lives and views?

One may see in a single event the type of all such failures and resulting crimes. On the seventeenth of February, 1600, Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake by order of the Holy Inquisition. His offense?

> Apart from his disdainful, boasting nature and his attack on contemporary Christianity, the chief causes of Bruno's downfall were his rejection of the Aristotelian astronomy for that of Copernicus, which allowed for the possibility of innumerable worlds, and his pantheistic tendencies. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*.)

Today practically all the civilized world recognizes Bruno as both scientific and philosophical pioneer and martyred hero: How could he have been so completely misunderstood? (That the inquisitors well understood the threat to their authority in Bruno's ideas goes without saying, but this only presents the problem of *levels* of understanding.)

This year, half a century after the brutal execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, the governor of Massachusetts proclaimed a Sacco and Vanzetti Memorial Day (August 23, the anniversary of their death), declaring that the trial was permeated by "prejudice" against foreign radicals. A press commentator observed: "Governor Dukakis is the first state chief executive in history to, in effect, officially call the entire history of a modern criminal legal proceeding unfair and improper."

While there have been "patriotic" objections to this admission, the civilized world rejoiced in its retrospective rhetorical justice, while shame for what happened in 1923 still burns in decent hearts around the country. Today, in Rome, there stands a statue honoring Bruno, erected by his admirers in 1889—without, however, either guarded

approval or expressions of corporate remorse from dignitaries of the Church.

Such failures of understanding by no means occur only on the side of the conservative or religious establishments. Determined misunderstanding has as many forms as there are blocks of powerful opinion, and we need recall only the Moscow Trials conducted under Stalin's supervision for comparable horrors on a mass scale. Poignant instances of revolutionary or radical cruelty, made almost unbearable by their casual, matter-of-course occurrence, are reported by Simone Weil, who went to Spain during the Civil War to give support to the Loyalists. Of her two months' experience at the front she wrote:

> One sets out as a volunteer, with the idea of sacrifice, and finds oneself in a war which resembles a war of mercenaries only with much more cruelty and with less human respect for the enemy . . . I no longer felt any inner compulsion to participate in a war which, instead of being what it had appeared when it began—a war of famished peasants against landed proprietors and their clerical supporters—had become a war between Russia on the one hand and Germany and Italy on the other.

How many sorts of failure in understanding are here represented or implied?

Crimes of ideological righteousness were for Simone Weil day-to-day experiences. After the defeat of a Loyalist expedition against Majorca, an angry retaliation took place:

> In that little town [Sitges], in which nothing at all had happened, . . . they killed nine so-called fascists. Among the nine was a baker, aged about thirty, whose crime, so I was told, was that he had not joined the "Somaten" militia. His old father, whose only child and support he was, went mad. One more incident: in a light engagement a small international party of militiamen from various countries captured a boy of fifteen who was a member of the Falange. As soon as he was captured, and still trembling from the sight of his comrades being killed alongside him, he said he had been enrolled compulsorily. He was searched and a medal of the Virgin and a Falange card were found on him. Then he was sent to Durruti, the leader of the column, who lectured him for an hour on the beauties of the anarchist ideal and gave him the choice between death and enrolling immediately in the ranks of his captors, against his comrades of yesterday. Durruti gave this child twenty-four hours to think it over, and when the time was up he said no and was shot. Yet Durruti was in some ways an admirable man. (*Selected Essays*, Oxford University Press, 1962).

And so are they all—in some ways—admirable men.

More valuable, surely, than those who show us how to be right are the rare counselors and friends who try to give instruction in the art of understanding. They teach, of course, a "resultless" kind of thinking. The French aphorism, "To understand all is to forgive all," is sometimes cited by its tough-minded opponents with withering contempt, since the project, as a famous nineteenth-century revolutionist said, is not to understand history but to change it. Today, looking back on the harvest of such efforts, and the counter-measures adopted against them, we may find sufficient reason for returning to the effort toward understanding. We are beginning to suspect that there can be no righteousness without it.

Could there be any help from science in the quest—or, initially, in identifying the chief barriers to mutual understanding? Ortega thought so. He believed that there are great cyclic rhythms in history, as a result of which dominant views are greatly changed. In such transformations of belief, which he thought it possible to generalize, he saw the basis for a science of history—a "metahistory" which would "bear the same relation to concrete histories as physiology to the clinic." But metahistory would be distinguished from other sciences by a conscious interweaving of predictable with unpredictable elements.

> It is not of course possible to foretell the various events that tomorrow will bring forth; neither, indeed, would such a prediction be of any real interest. But on the other hand it is perfectly possible to foresee the characteristic thought of the immediate future, to anticipate the general features of the period that will succeed one's own. In other words, a thousand unpredictable accidents occur in any period, but the

> period itself is not an accident. It possesses a fixed and unmistakable structure. Its case is similar to that of individual destinies: no one knows what is going to happen to him tomorrow; but he does know his own character, his own desires and his own powers, and hence the way in which he will react to whatever accidents may befall him. Every life has a pre-established normal orbit, in the course of which accident, without essentially deflecting the orbit in question, traces certain sinuosities and indentations. (*The Modern Theme*, 1931; Harper paperback, 1961.)

What are the elements of a science of history?

> Human life is an internally motived process in which the essential events do not occur as directed from outside upon the subject of experience, but evolve from within it, as fruits and flowers evolve from seeds. . . . In the last analysis science is nothing but the effort we make to understand anything. And we have understood a situation historically when we perceive that it arises necessarily from another situation anterior to it. What kind of necessity is here meant—physical, mathematical or logical? None of these: the necessity in question is related to such classifications, yet it has a character peculiar to itself: it is psychological necessity.

Here Ortega may have replied to an all-important question by presenting an all-important mystery, but it seems better to leave open a matter which, if prematurely closed, leads to crimes of the sort we took samples of earlier.

Ortega gives this account of the changing conditions of psychological necessity:

> Now the thought of any age can assume two opposite attitudes to what has been thought in other ages. Especially is this the case in regard to the immediate past, which is always the most powerful influence and contains in concentrated form everything anterior to the present. There are in fact some ages in which thought regards itself as growing out of seeds already sown, and others which are conscious of the immediate past as of something in urgent need of radical reform. The first-named are the ages of pacific, the second those of militant philosophy, the aspiration of which is to destroy and completely supersede the past.

How does one feel about such things? Does he, almost by instinct, say to himself as he looks about, "All this has got to go!" Does he find himself in somewhat of an emotional quandary when overtaken by affection for some admirable individual who stands for the "other side"? And what of the mission-oriented *builder*—the man who gets things done because they need to be done, and because there are known ways of getting them done well—when he encounters the integrities of a proclaimed enemy of the social processes on which the builder must depend? These puzzles are frequent but usually ignored, and they remain unsolved. Has one's age a natural unity or must it be regarded as naturally split apart, or even fragmented? How is righteousness affected by such differences?

Generational succession plays a decisive part in these alterations of outlook:

> The changes in vital sensibility which are decisive in history, appear under the form of the generation. A generation is not a handful of outstanding men, nor simply a mass of men; it resembles a new integration of the social body, with its select minority and its gross multitude, launched upon an orbit of existence with a pre-established vital trajectory. The generation is a dynamic compromise between mass and individual, and is the most important conception in history. It is, so to speak, the pivot responsible for the movements of historical evolution. . . .
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> Life, then, for each generation, is a task in two dimensions, one of which consists in the reception, through the agency of the previous generation, of what has had life already, e.g., ideas, values, institutions and so on, while the other is the liberation of the creative genius inherent in the generation concerned.

There are various ways of thinking about these endowments and possibilities:

> What has been done by others, that is, executed and perfected in the sense of being completed, reaches us with a peculiar unction attached to it: it seems consecrated, and in view of the fact that we have not assisted in its construction, we tend to believe that it is the work of no one in particular even that it is reality itself. There is a moment at which the concepts of our teachers do not appear to us to be the opinions of particular men, but the truth itself come to dwell anonymously on earth. On the other hand our spontaneous sensibility, the thoughts and

> feelings which are our private possessions, never seem to us properly finished, complete and fixed, like a definite object: we regard them more as a species of internal flux, composed of less stable elements. This disadvantage is compensated by the greater expansiveness and adaptability to our own nature always characteristic of spontaneity.
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> The spirit of every generation depends upon the equation established between these two ingredients and on the attitude which the majority of the individuals concerned adopts toward each. Will that majority surrender to its inheritance, ignoring the internal promptings of spontaneity? Or will it obey the latter and defy the authority of the past?

Is it possible to withdraw from partisanship of either "ingredient" without failing in the quest for righteousness? As one reads Ortega, it is natural to watch for signs that will tell which "side" *he* is on. There may be an inclination to stop reading if we find him tacitly on the side of the unrighteous—who, after all, *cannot* be understood. But Ortega gives no betraying signs. He is truly in quest of understanding. He stands, for a time, "above the battle," not in order to escape from decision, but to see the alternatives more clearly. Almost never are they revealed by any mass or collectivist opinion.

He is acquainted with the difficulties which attend this sort of dispassionate study, involving both history and introspection:

> I am well aware that this operation, simple as it looks, is not so in the case of persons unaccustomed to the rigours and precisions of psychological analysis. There is nothing less customary, in fact, than such a forcing of the mind back upon and into itself. Man has been formed in his struggle with external nature and it is only easy for him to discern phenomena outside himself. When he looks within vision is clouded and he grows dizzy.

For Ortega, much of the failure of understanding results from the unwieldly mix of virtues with shortcomings inherent in the reasoning process. Pure rationality—typified by the mathematical system admired by Descartes—has a fascination that gathers in the moral sense as a subordinate ally. Meanwhile, the man who habitually consults experience is bound to discover the inadequacy of rational theory. No limiting abstractions can comprehend or cope with the infinite diversity of experience. Systems break down but life goes on. Systems anon order and save, anon damn and destroy. The pure rationalist has his truth and he learns to hate the empiricist who points to the endless relativities that defy all closed systems guaranteed to ensure good and outlaw evil. And when this sort of rationalist storms into politics, he has his system of perfect order, well thought out, in mind:

> To all else he is deaf and blind. For him what is anterior and what is present are equally undeserving of the least respect. On the contrary, from the rational point of view, they assume a positively criminal aspect. He urges, therefore, the extermination of the offending growth and the immediate installation of his definitive social order. . . . This is the temper which produces revolutions. . . .
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> The Constituent Assembly makes "solemn declaration of the rights of Man and of the Citizen" in order "that, it being possible to compare the acts of the legislative and executive powers, at any given moment, with the final aim of 'every' political institution, they may be the more respected, so that the demands of citizens, being founded henceforth on simple and unquestionable principles," etc., etc. We might be reading a geometrical treatise. The men of 1790 were not content with legislating for themselves: they not only decreed the nullity of the past and of the present, but they even suppressed future history as well, by decreeing the manner in which "every political institution was to be constituted. . . . "
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> It is illogical to guillotine a prince and replace him by a principle. The latter, no less than the former, places life under an absolute autocracy. And this is, precisely, an impossibility. Neither rationalist absolutism, which keeps reason but annihilates life, nor relativism, which keeps life but dissolves reason, are possibilities.

Little by little the barriers to our understanding of one another are made clear by such analysis. Seeing that they exist, if not why, is at least a step toward taking them down.

Yet we have, as every observant person knows, a curious reluctance toward seeing such things so clearly, since sight of them may create

unwelcome obligations. There are psychological subtleties that determined rationalists—being more Cartesians than students of themselves—consistently and stubbornly avoid. And the empiricists have corresponding difficulties.

> We tend [writes Maslow in *Toward a Psychology of Being*] to be afraid of any knowledge that could cause us to despise ourselves or to make us feel inferior, weak, worthless, evil, shameful. We protect ourselves and our ideal images of ourselves by repression and similar defenses, which are essentially techniques by which we avoid becoming conscious of unpleasant or dangerous truths. . . .
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> Most religions have a thread of anti-intellectualism (along with other threads, of course), some trace of preference for faith or belief or piety rather than for knowledge, or the feeling that *some* forms of knowledge were too dangerous to meddle with and had best be forbidden or reserved to a few special people. In most cultures those revolutionaries who defied the gods by seeking out their secrets were punished heavily, like Adam and Eve, Prometheus and Oedipus, and have been remembered as warnings to all others not to try to be godlike.
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> And, if I may say it in a very condensed way, it is precisely the godlike in ourselves that we are ambivalent about. . . . This is one aspect of the basic human predicament, that we are simultaneously worms and gods. . . . Thus to discover in oneself a great talent can certainly bring exhilaration but it also brings a fear of the dangers and responsibilities and duties of being a leader and of being all alone. Responsibility can be seen as a heavy burden and evaded as long as possible.

Godlike responsibilities in a world of finite possibilities—is this the bewildering composition of the human situation?

Ortega does not have the answers, but he seems likely to have made no serious mistakes.

# *REVIEW*
## "DESIGN WITH NATURE"

EVIDENCE accumulates that a new kind of science is coming into being. The protagonists of this change sometimes prefix the title of their category of work with the adjective "humanistic," but this is an inadequate distinction. A better identification might be that the new scientists seek to establish meanings rather than describe motions; they are looking for signs and validations of purpose instead of giving accounts of "behavior," although both motions and behavior supply foundation data for their disciplines.

The mood of this change is illustrated in a recent paper by Anne Buttimer, who teaches geography at Clark University. Writing on the "Dynamism of Lifeworld," she quotes an Appalachian housewife's reaction to life in the city where her family had recently moved (taken from Robert Coles' *Children in Crisis*)*:*

> I have to think back, though; I love to think back to the days we lived up in the hollow and neither Tack nor I cared what hour it was. We knew what we had to do, and we went and did it. There was the sun, of course; the sun's time was enough for us. Up here, we never see the sun. I will wonder to myself sometimes: what has happened to the sun and the moon? I can go for weeks and never see any sign of the moon, and the stars are always behind some cloud. And the sun doesn't shine into our windows; we're at the wrong angle, it seems. . . . If I had to say one thing I miss most, it's the sunrise. And the second thing, that would be the sunset. I see why everyone here has to have a watch or a clock nearby. They'd never know otherwise whether it's light or dark in the street.

There is pathos here, but also something more important. A quality of life has been subtracted from the existence of the migrant to the city, something profoundly missed. Think of all those who, unlike this Appalachian woman, have no idea of what they are missing!

Inviting geographers to enter into such psychological realities, see them as primary elements of their science, Dr. Buttimer remarks:

> Conventional research on migration has focused on forces which push and pull, on images, anticipations, and realizations; ultimately, a theory is sought to "explain" assimilation to the new environment. Ask any migrant "object" of such study whether these accounts adequately describe his experiences, or help him to understand or cope with his new situation in any sense beyond the prerequisites of economic or social survival.

For ordinary people, the natural environment is filled with clues to the meaning of the world. Again, these same ordinary people have in themselves instincts and intuitions concerning the meaning of their lives. Since they live in the world, some collaboration with the world, some almost spontaneous fulfillment of *its* meaning, is essential to a bearable if not a happy life. Geography which takes this necessity into account is a new sort of geography.

How are such new sciences born? The provocations are as evident as the fact of their development—they come from a combination of pain with inspiration. Their written expressions are a harmony of both, creating a new scientific-literary form. We badly need these expressions, which speak with clarity and compassion to our bewildered condition.

The most exemplary form of the new kind of science is Ecology, an inquiry which was not even named until a century ago. Today Ecology is acquiring extraordinary popular authority—more, perhaps, than any other sort of "research"—and constituting itself a cornerstone of a new "philosophy of life." How does all this work?

*Design With Nature,* by Ian McHarg, is an ideal illustration. Actually, ecology is as much a basic attitude of mind as it is a definable scientific discipline with cognitive goals. It is an attitude which, in part, grows out of an intensity of action in behalf of the world. All work which requires *dwelling in* as well as "knowledge of" some aspect or portion of the world generates a particular, an almost unique kind of understanding. In his youth, McHarg suffered the same sort of impact experienced by the Appalachian woman. When,

after World War II and four years at Harvard, he came back to his native country around Glasgow, the diverse raw materials of his future career lay before him:

> I came expecting to see it shrunken, for this is the lot of the place revisited, but not to find it obliterated. Yet the City of Glasgow had annexed this land and made it its own. Each hill had been bulldozed to fill a valley, the burn was buried in culverts, trees had been felled, farmhouses and smithy were demolished, every tree, shrub, marsh, rock, fern and orchid, every single vestige of that which had been, was gone. In their stead were uniform four-story walkup apartments, seventy feet face to face, seventy feet back to back, fifteen feet from gable to gable. The fronts were divided by an asphalt street lined with gaunt sodium lamps. The backs were stamped soil, defined by drunken chestnut paling; drying green poles supported the sodden laundry.
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> The smear of Glasgow had moved out—taking much and destroying everything, it had given nothing. This was public investment for a perfectly necessary public purpose accomplished in the name of architecture and planning. The reasons for living in this place were manifest. It held much, offered variety and delight. It could well have been marvelous but the results were otherwise.

From this sort of introduction the book launches into the science of appropriate changes by man in the earth, beneficial to both, moving from general geographical considerations to a number of particular projects, illustrating with either completed or in-process community designs how we may live as friends of the earth, and how to design with nature as collaborator and guide.

Why should a landscape architect be called an "ecologist"? McHarg couldn't help but become an ecologist. He saw the pain and felt the inspiration, and absorption in ecology was a natural result. As Lewis Mumford says in his introduction to this book:

> Ian McHarg, while trained professionally as a town planner and a landscape architect, might better be described as an inspired ecologist: his is a mind that not merely looks at all nature and human activity from the external vantage point of ecology, but who likewise sees this world from within, as a participant and actor, bringing to the cold, dry, colorless world of science the special contribution that differentiates the higher mammals, above all human beings, from all other animate things: vivid color and passion, emotions, feelings, sensitivities, erotic and esthetic delights—all that makes the human mind at its fullest so immensely superior to a computer, or to under-dimensioned minds that have adapted themselves to a computer's limitations. Not the least merit of this book, for all its wealth of relevant scientific information, is that "he who touches it touches a man."

The scientific information—which, as Mumford suggests, seems encyclopedic—is so well collected and imparted that it reveals the grain of life, its forms, flowing movements, fulfillments, and necessities. This is the kind of knowledge which results, as Polanyi put it, from *dwelling* in what one seeks to know. The organized complexity of the earth and its inhabitants—the "biosphere," as it is called—cannot be understood by abstraction and quantification alone. Reliance on abstraction too easily becomes a monstrous deception concerning the nature of things. Ecology is the ordering in the mind of the interdependent diversities of living process, and knowing about them requires one to *feel* them also.

Inevitably, McHarg finds himself moved to philosophical asides. They bubble up as an essential part of what he has to say. To dwell in the world in a quest for meaning is to generate philosophy, and science without this efflorescence of felt meanings and directional guides to harmonious action is a sterile undertaking, a mighty talent buried under ground.

McHarg speaks of the pantheism which ecology inspires:

> In the pantheist view the entire phenomenal world contains godlike attributes: the relations of man to this world are sacramental. It is believed that the actions of man in nature can affect his own fate, that these actions are consequential, immediate and relevant to life. There is, in this relationship, no non-nature category—nor is there either romanticism or sentimentality.

> It is deep in history that we abandoned such a view. The conception of man—exclusively divine, given dominion over all life and non-life, enjoined to subdue the earth—contained in the creation story of Genesis represents the total antithesis of the pantheist view. While the Greeks conceived not only of man Gods, but nature Gods as well, this survived only marginally into the humanism of the Renaissance and pantheism has been lost to the western tradition, in Europe it persists only with the Lapps. Yet, as leading theologians retreat in consternation from the literality of Genesis—Buber and Heschel, Tillich and Weigel and even more Teilhard de Chardin, offended by its arrogant transcendence—the more quietly deferential view of the pantheists seems to present a better beginning, at least a working hypothesis. If divinity there is, then all is divine. If so, then the acts of man in nature are sacramental.

Not the least of this book is its record of ecological and landscaping achievements. By reason of the quality of his thinking, McHarg is able to combine ecological missionary endeavor with the practice of his profession. He is able to show that the maltreatment of nature in the expectation of a profit does not really pay. There are chapters on developments transformed, watersheds preserved, flood plains protected, providing the same amount of (and far better) housing than ruthless invasion would provide. Besides being a practicing landscape architect McHarg is a teacher who heads the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the University of Pennsylvania, and this educational role has given him opportunity to demonstrate the care and protection of large waterways and coastal areas.

*Design With Nature* is indeed a landmark book, combining warning with promise, showing excellences realized despite human faults, and with a persuasive demonstration that this "new" kind of science works. The edition we have been describing is a paperback ($6.95) issued by Doubleday for the American Museum of Natural History.

# *COMMENTARY*
## CALENDAR AND READER

THE War Resisters League Peace Calendar and Appointment Book for 1978 has "Nonviolent Struggle Around the World" for its theme. The calendars are $3.25 each, four for $12. The address for orders is WRL, 339 Lafayette St., New York, N. Y. 10012. The calendar provides evidence that nonviolence works, showing by text and illustration where and how it works, has worked in the past and is working in the present.

> In Ecuador, a nonviolent movement achieved land reform—despite the murder of a leader of the peasant movement. In the Larzac region of France six years of nonviolent protest have brought the army's plans for the expansion of a military base to a standstill. And in the United States the United Farm Workers have won historic victories in their struggle for justice. . .
>
> The Calendar has 128 pages and is wire-bound for convenient flat opening. The date pages can be removed when the year is over, leaving a bound volume for your permanent library.

The editor of the 1978 calendar is Beverly Woodward.

We are late this year—as seems to happen regularly—with this announcement. The winter solstice is a week away, with Christmas only three or four days later. But there may be those who don't care so much about meeting "deadlines" with their gifts at this time of year, and will want one or more calendars.

We might mention, also, that copies of the *Manas Reader* are still available in the hardback edition for $8—483 pages of MANAS articles selected from twenty-three years of publication. People say they appreciate them as gifts. The *Reader* should be ordered from Cunningham Press, 3036 West Main Street, Alhambra, Calif. 91801, adding 50 cents for shipping (and 6% sales tax in California).

Not to forget the idea of giving a subscription to MANAS—See the ad on page 8 for rates.

Now and then we get letters from readers who say how glad they are someone gave them a MANAS subscription.

The editors and publishers are very much pleased, of course, by this friendly encouragement.

# CHILDREN
## . . . and Ourselves
### "TRENDS" IN EDUCATION

MORE than half a century of consolidation of rural schools and districts, in order to save money and provide better education, has proved a failure. This is the conclusion, not of an indignant champion of rural life and the one-room school house, but of researchers of the U. S. Government Department, Health, Education and Welfare, set forth with ample support in a pamphlet, *Economy, Effi*ciency, *and Equality: The Myths of Rural School and District Consolidation.* (Copies may be had free from Robert J. Cunningham, School Finance, Dept. of HEW, National Institute of Education, Washington, D. C. 20008.)

The nostalgia this report may inspire has full justification. Who has not seen, somewhere, a deserted, forlornly empty rural school house where, as the local inhabitants relate, youngsters once got a *fine* education, better than anything in the big schools? Or an improvised playground with its school building torn down, now barren of all but accumulating junk and weeds. The children of one such one-room school we heard about were a year ahead in their studies, compared with the children they joined in the consolidated school—which takes them over an hour to reach by bus, and another hour to come home. The high-school students in this area, who must go farther, lose four hours out of their day just traveling.

This sort of thing has been happening all over, during the past fifty years. According to a review of the HEW pamphlet in the *North Fork* (Colorado) *Times* (May 19):

> The 39-page report . . . states that from 1920 to 1972 the number of one-teacher rural schools dropped from 149,000 to 1,475. The number of rural school districts went from 128,000 to 16,960. The number of rural high schools was cut in half while the number of students tripled.
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> [The report's major conclusions] are that, in general, consolidation—even of one-room school houses—saves no money and provides no measurable educational advantages.

The costs of the big schools go up, absorbing the savings of consolidation. The schooling may seen flashier, but is really no better. The writers of the report looked at ten rural high schools in Vermont:

> Six of these schools had 16 to 60 graduates in 1974 and were classified as "small." The other four schools graduated from 123 to 245 students, and were classified as "large."
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> The authors found no significant differences in cost per student or in the percentage of students going on to college among the 10 high schools.
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> The report says: " . . . structural reforms such as consolidation are unlikely to positively affect either academic achievement or lifetime earnings."
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> The report also says, of recent studies there is not one which records a consistent, positive relationship between the size of school and student achievement, independent of IQ and social class.

Why, then, have so many people proposed, endorsed, and submitted to consolidation for some fifty years?

> Partly, they say, because rural areas were swept up in America's rush toward largeness and modernization. The order of the day became large farms and large businesses and large schools.
>
> The report also states: "On closer examination, rural-school reform becomes not so much a paradox as a transfer of power from laymen to professionals. The rural school reformers talked about democracy and rural needs, but they believed they had the answers and should run the schools."
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> Much of the pressure for more expertise and consolidation, the report says, came from the state and national level, where educational administrators used state and federal money to force consolidation reforms. . . .
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> "The impetus to consolidate rural schools almost always came from outside the rural community." . . . rural people accepted consolidation in part because it was forced on them and in part because they hoped it would give their children a better education.

> The authors urge that more attention be paid to small schools. They say that until now research has focused on big schools; small schools were seen mainly as something to be eliminated.

This is a good kind of criticism—the kind parents may have opportunity to act on from time to time.

Another useful kind that parents might take to heart comes from a Georgia high-school teacher who, noting that parents are blaming teachers and the schools for the fact that graduates sometimes can hardly read, declares that the parents are themselves at fault. Writing in the *Christian Science Monitor* for Sept. 20, this teacher, Charles Lewis, says:

> For the past 20 years they have given to the schools more and more responsibility. We have finally paid the piper. Today's schools are required to cover so many areas that they do nothing well. . . . Maybe it began when the parents turned to the schools to offer courses (or sections of courses) in ethics and religion. The home couldn't seem to instill honesty, integrity, responsibility, and other values, so the school was asked to help. The schools now have the task of instilling the values that were once left to home and church.
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> Or maybe it began when the schools were required to provide resources of physical education. . . Whereas 19th century schools set aside recess as a time to relax from studies, the modern educational plant has to invest thousands of dollars for gyms and equipment. The reading lab has become a luxury; the football team, a necessity.
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> The trend continues full blast. In many schools, teachers are required to offer advice on personal hygiene. If the parents cannot—or will not—teach their children to bathe, the schools must do it. Patriotic businessmen become irate when high school graduates fail to see the benefits of the free enterprise system and question the need for large profits. Their solution: require the students to take a course which will show the advantages of that system. . . .
>
> And on it goes. Whatever the problem, it is thrown at the schools. No wonder they graduate illiterates. The students have so many other courses to take they can't fit English in their schedule.

While we are in this complaining vein—talking about troubles that at least have remedies—we might add the trials of another English teacher, Rita Oleyar, in a California college. She can hardly read the papers her students turn in. (Editors have a similar problem with writers who scribble in *ink* their illegible corrections on galley and page proofs, apparently confident that typesetters have a crystal ball.) Rita Oleyar noticed the dramatic contrast with her students' work in letters she received from several hundred alumni of the orphan asylum where she grew up, replying to her questions in connection with some research. Telling about it in an article in the *Los Angeles Times* (Sept. 20), she said:

> I was struck, in the majority of responses, by the clarity of expression, judicious choice of words and the smooth, coherent flow of language. But what impressed me even more was the legibility—yea, the sheer attractiveness—of the handwriting.

There follows a pæon of praise for the Palmer Method, by which the orphans learned to write clearly without getting cramps in their fingers. Nobody uses the Palmer Method now, and handwriting has become very "individual." Well, this matter may be arguable, but Miss Oleyar's further comments are not:

> As early as the fourth grade we began copying—not the Dick and Jane inanities of the modern schoolbook but long, sumptuous sentences from Shakespeare, Benjamin Franklin and the Bible.
>
> A modern educational observer might have thought that no real learning was taking place, since we couldn't fully grasp the meaning of what we wrote. But in the years since then I've come to realize that slavish copying has long been used for developing a grand style of one's own—a practice followed, in fact, by such superb stylists as Milton and Franklin. The reason, apparently, is that the cadences and graceful syntactic patterns of master writers can form deep, irrevocable tracks in tender young brains.

Sounds imitative, but it didn't do the orphans this teacher grew up with any harm.

# *FRONTIERS*

## The Round-the-Clock Experts

IN the General Semantics magazine, *Et Cetera*, for last June, George Gerbner, a communications researcher, pro poses that Television is "The New State Religion." He lists these characteristics of the medium (in the United States):

> Television consumes more time and attention of more people than all other media and leisure time activities combined. The television set is on for six hours and fifteen minutes a day in the average American home, and its sounds and images now fill the living space and symbolic world of most Americans.
>
> Unlike the other media, you do not have to wait for, plan for, go out to, or seek out television. It comes directly to you at home and is there all the time. It has become a member of the family, telling its stories patiently, compellingly, untiringly. Few parents, teachers, or priests can compete with its vivid demonstrations of what people of all kinds are like and how society works.
>
> Just as television requires no mobility, it requires no literacy. . . . Television now informs most people in the United States—many of its viewers simply do not read—and much of its information comes from what is called entertainment. . . . Television is truly a cradle-to-grave experience. . . . Only a minority of children and older age groups watch the few programs (none in "prime time") especially designed for them. . . .
>
> Television is essentially in the business of assembling heterogeneous audiences and selling their time to advertisers or other institutional sponsors. . . . Heavy viewers of television are more apprehensive, anxious, and mistrustful of others than light viewers in the same age, sex and educational groups. The fear that viewing American television seems to generate, the consequent quest for security and protection by the authorities, the effective dissolution of autonomous publics, and the ease with which credible threats and scares can be used (or provoked) to justify almost any policy create a fundamentally new cultural situation. The new conditions of synthetic consciousness-making pose new problems, difficulties, and challenges for those who wish to realistically analyze or guide public understanding of society.

In a paper on the modernized poverty of consumerism—to be part of a book scheduled for publication next year—Ivan Illich comments broadly on the psycho-social effects of this "new cultural situation":

> Fifty years ago, most of the words which an American heard were personally spoken to him as an individual, or to somebody standing nearby. Only occasionally words reached him as the undifferentiated member of a crowd—in the classroom, church, rally or circus. Words were mostly like handwritten, sealed letters, unlike the junk that now pollutes our mails. Today, words that grope for one person's attention have become rare. Engineered staples of images, ideas, feelings, and opinions, packaged and delivered through the media, assault our sensibilities with round-the-clock regularity. Two points now become evident: (1) What occurs with language fits the patterns of an increasingly wide range of need-satisfaction relationships; (2) this replacement of convivial means by manipulative industrial ware is truly universal, and relentlessly makes the New York teacher, the Chinese commune member, the Bantu school boy, and the Brazilian sergeant alike.

Both George Gerbner and Ivan Illich would, we suspect, see an almost direct connection between this need-and-consumption-dominated regime of synthetic consciousness and the concerted attack on the dietary changes recommended for Americans in a report prepared by the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human needs. The proposed diet reforms are given in a *Manchester Guardian* report (Sept. 4):

> —increase complex carbohydrate (vegetables, fruits, grains) consumption to account for 55 to 60 per cent of caloric intake.
>
> —reduce over-all fat consumption from approximately 40 per cent to 30 per cent.
>
> —reduce saturated fat consumption to account for about 10 per cent of total calories, and balance that with polyunsaturated and mono-saturated fats, which should account for about 10 per cent of calories each.
>
> —reduce cholesterol consumption to about 300 milligrams a day.

—reduce sugar consumption by about 40 per cent to account for about 25 per cent of total calories.

—reduce salt consumption by 50 to 85 per cent.

What can be wrong with this modestly sensible program?

First, the cattle producers protested because the goals recommended reducing the consumption of meat and increasing the consumption of fish and poultry. Then the sugar interests said the recommendation for reducing the intake of sugar by 40 per cent had no scientific basis.

The National Canners' Association is upset because the report suggests using fresh and frozen instead of canned vegetables.

The egg producers had their say: the nutrition committee heard from them that cholesterol levels are not lowered by a reduction in egg consumption.

The most sweeping attack on the dietary goals, however, came from the American Medical Association. The AMA said they should not be adopted because there is no proof that diet is related to disease and, besides, changing American eating habits might lead to economic dislocation. The National Dairy Council endorsed the AMA's statement.

What are the elements of this situation? Obviously, there are the good experts and the bad experts. The good experts have our ear and our agreement, but the bad experts are retained by the media and therefore control a large part of the public mind.

How shall we replace the dominance of bad experts with the persuasion of good experts? Since intelligence and discrimination are decisive in achieving the common good, persuasion and example are the only available means. Social pressure (of the sort the town meeting once exerted) is not available in a mass society. Coercion never works in matters where intelligence must rule. No one has ever successfully legislated intelligence into authority by political activity alone. One can sometimes legislate the result of intelligence, but only after general understanding and assent have been achieved.